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Dramatic Scenes,

SONNETS,

AND OTHER POEMS.

BY

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD,

AUTHOR OF FOSCARI, JULIAN, AND OUR VILLAGE.

LONDON:

GEO. B. WHITTAKER,

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1827.

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TO
HER KIND AND EARLY FRIEND,
WILLIAM CHAMBERLAYNE, ESQ. M.P.

This Volume

IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY

THE AUTHOR.

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DRAMATIC SCENES.



CUNIGUNDA'S VOW.

A DRAMATIC SCENE.

The story which forms the groundwork of the following short drama, will be found in Mr. Russell's delightful volumes on Germany; it has also given occasion to a very spirited ballad by Miss Landen, inserted, if I mistake not, in my friend Mr. Watts's *Literary Souvenir* for 1826.

CHARACTERS.

CUNIGUNDA, *Lady of the Kienast.*

SIR ALBERT, *a stranger Knight.*

ERNEST, *Cunigunda's aged Seneschal.*

GERTRUDE, } *Her waiting women.*

EDITHA, }

OTTO, *her page.*

Squires, pages, grooms, and waiting women.

SCENE, *a hall in the Castle of the Kienast in Silesia.*

CUNIGUNDA'S VOW.

Enter ERNEST, to GERTRUDE and EDITHA.

Ernest. Where is thy lady, Gertrude?

Gertrude. On the turret

Watching the first glimpse of the stranger knight

Who comes to-day to attempt the perilous feat

Ordained by her rash vow.

Editha. Poor Cunigunda !

Now pays she dearly the o'erweening pride

Of haughty beauty. Love hath well avenged

His martyred votaries.

Ernest. Speak not with that tone

Of pity, maiden ! I'm an old retainer

Of Cunigunda's house ; have carried her

A smiling child within mine arms ; have loved her
Even as a father, as a father gloried
In her unparagoned charms. But her cold cruelty
Doth fret my very heart-strings. Not enough
For this proud beauty to reject all hearts
Of knight, or count, or prince,—for princes sued
At Cunigunda's feet—but she must tempt
Each wooer to his death, grim ghastly death,
Untimely bloody death, by that stern vow
That he should win her, who should safely ride
Around these Kienast walls,—the narrow walls,
Of these steep mountain towers ! She might as well
Command them ride upon a falchion's edge,
Or stand erect upon the topmost spray
Of yon tall poplar. Many a gallant steed
Lies whitening in the abyss, many a brave knight
Hath perished in the rocky gulph ;—and now
Another victim comes !

Editha.

One—If he fall,

The shades of all that for her sake have died,

Were they as countless as the leaves that dance
In Hirsberg vale, would be avenged ! She loves him,
Believe it, Ernest, with the fervid love
Of stern and haughty hearts.

Ernest. Believe who will !

She, thy proud mistress, love the falcon knight !
Albert the falcon knight ! A wandering stranger,
Whose house, whose name she knows not. Tush !

Editha. Yet Albert

Is the sole name she speaks ; the falcon crest
Her only heraldry.

Ernest. Princes have sighed

For Cunigunda, and that she should sigh
For this poor knight—

Gertrude She doth !

Ernest. One all unapt

To win a lady's eye ! She that beheld
Unmoved the gay Count Cassel, whose light step
Came bounding like the roe, whose glance shot fire,—
She that beheld unshaken his bright form

Lie stiff and mute before her,—she that saw,
Without a tear, the bleeding mangled corse
Of Rudolf of Thuringia, blooming boy,
Fair, slender, blue-eyed boy, whose nut-brown curls
Clustered o'er his white brow, whose damask cheek,
And coral lip, and brilliant smile, and round
And joyous voice were redolent of youth,
And hope, and life ;—think'st thou that she, whom bloom
And charms like these ne'er touched, can love yon sad
And pallid stranger ?

Editha.

With idolatry,

Passing what hath been told or feigned of love
In story or in song. Unapt to win
A lady's eye ! Ernest, thou hast been trained
In courts, and camps, and battles ; thou know'st well
All that pertains to man, but woman's heart
To thee is a sealed book. I tell thee, Ernest,
Yon pallid stranger, with the serious grace
Of his fine features, delicate yet full
Of mild command ; the dark locks closely shorn

Around the noble head ; the manly form
Where grandeur blends with elegance ; the voice
Clear, deep, and ringing, fitting instrument
Of lofty thought ; the reverential port
Majestically bending with a proud
And prompt obedience, to the very name
Of woman rendering homage ;—such an one
Might win—

Gertrude. She comes !

Enter CUNIGUNDA and OTTO.

Cunigunda. Unbar the gates ! Be quick,
Unbar the gates ! Why bide ye loitering here
When ye should fly to bid the Castellan
Give present entrance to the falcon knight—
The valiant falcon knight ?

[Exit ERNEST.

Ye dally here,
Whilst he stands waiting,—he ! Why of themselves
The Kienast gates should ope to him.

Otto. He's here,
Fair Madam.

Enter SIR ALBERT and a PAGE.

Cunigunda. Now, Sir Albert!

Albert. Beauteous lady,
I come to win thee.—Bid them lead my courser
Round to the court of guard. Is't not the way
That we must gain the ramparts?

[Exit PAGE.]

Sweet, I come
To win thee or to perish.

Cunigunda. Oh, No! No!

Albert. Why, thou shouldst arm me for this viewless
peril
As for some tourney fray. Why dost thou sigh?
Why turn so deadly pale?

Cunigunda. 'Tis a vast peril!

Albert. 'Twas thine own vow imposed it; thine own
choice;

And now 'tis mine. I knew afore I saw thee
What danger must be dared for Cunigunda,
And knowing came. Thou wouldst not sure fright *me*
With that same bugbear Peril ? I'm a warrior
Trained to defy, to seek each several form
Of death in glorious battle. Wouldst thou teach me
A cowardice now ?—Farewell !—The sun shines bright
On hill and valley ; the soft breezes play
O'er leaf and flower ; over our heads the lark
Chaunts his gay matins ; Nature smiles on me
And my high purpose ;—for this deed is holy,
Thrice holy, lady !—When I come again—
Farewell !

Cunigunda. Oh go not ! go not !

Albert.

Cunigunda

Hast thou not sworn to yield thy hand to none,
Save him who rides unscathed around these steep
And narrow walls ? Is not that oath proclaimed
On earth, and registered in heaven ?

Cunigunda.

Alas !

Albert. And I too have a vow recorded there.
To do this deed or perish.

Cunigunda. Oh, go not!
Not yet! not yet!

Albert. Why should I dally?

Cunigunda. Stay.
A month, a little month! Thou wilt not? Then
A week, a day, an hour! Grant but such respite.
As the poor sentenced criminal may claim
When he craves time for prayer.—Oh, go not yet!
Not yet! not yet!

Albert. Is this the soft relenting
Of woman's tender heart to all whom pain
Or danger threaten? Didst thou thus implore
Henry of Cassel? or the gentle boy
Young Rudolf of Thuringia?

Cunigunda. No. Oh, frown not,
Nor turn away thy head, nor snatch thy hand
From mine! They knew the peril that they braved,
And they would brave that peril. Canst thou blame me

That I ne'er loved afore ? that I love now ?

Oh, go not, Albert !

Albert. Lady I am bound

By a strong fettering vow.—If I return

This hand is mine ?

Cunigunda. Ay, hand and heart. Yet go not !

Beseech thee, stay with me !

Albert. When I come back

Thou art wholly mine ?

Cunigunda. Ay ; ay. But go not yet !

Albert. Mine to dispose even as I will ?

Cunigunda. Ay, dearest,

Even as thou wilt. But stay with me awhile !

Stay ! stay !

[*Exit ALBERT.*

Editha. He's gone !

Cunigunda. Oh, stop him ! Say I beg !

Say I command ! Fly ! fly !

[*Exit OTTO.*

And yet my oath,

My fatal, fatal oath ! Without such trial
We may not wed—But, oh, to see him dashed,
As they have been, from off the wall and lain
A pale disfigured corse—Oh horror ! horror !

Re-enter OTTO.

Stop him, I say ; and if need be by force.
Command him hither.

Otto. *Lady*——

Cunigunda. Dost thou hear ?

Where is the falcon knight ? Am I not mistress
Within these towers ? Command him hither.

Otto. *Lady,*

Even as he left thee, at a bound he sprang
On his proud steed, and scaled the rampart stairs ;
Ere now he's on the walls.

Cunigunda. Oh save him ! save him,
Ye saints that watch o'er love ! Go some of ye
To the high turret that o'erhangs the Castle,
And look ye send me blessed tidings—no !

The truth ! the very truth ! Are ye not gone ?

[*Exeunt OTTO and GERTRUDE.*

Editha. Wilt thou not go thyself ? 'Twere a less
grief

Than crouching there in that strong agony
Of fear—thy head between thy hands, thy limbs.
Shivering, thy bosom panting. Go !

Cunigunda. He'll die !

He'll die ! And how could I endure—He'll die
For me ! for me !

Editha. Take comfort, lady.

Cunigunda. Comfort !

Who ever passed that dread abyss, where yawns
The Hirschberg valley under the high rock
Crowned with our frowning battlements, or dared
The desperate leap from tower to tower, nor fell
Crushed, breathless, motionless ? Who e'er returned
Alive ?—Oh horror ! horror ! Edith, fly !
Speed me some tidings.

[*Exit EDITHA.*

He must die ; and I—

I that so loved him, I that would have given
My life a thousand fold to save him—I
Shall be his murderess.

Enter ERNEST.

Ernest. Nay, lady, nay,
There's yet a hope.

Cunigunda. Old man, art thou turned flatterer ?
He'll perish.

Ernest. I beheld the manèged steed
Ascend the steep and narrow stair ; a steed
Of Araby, light-limbed and fine, with eyes
Of living fire half starting from his slim
And veiny head ; a hot and mettled steed ;
Yet trained to such obedience, that each motion
Of the swift foot seemed guided by the will
Of the bold rider, even as they had been
One and incorporate. If man may atchieve
This perilous deed, the falcon knight alone—

Cunigunda. Ernest, thou shalt have lands enow to
make

Thyself a belted knight ! Now blessings on thee
That bring'st me hope !—But Edith, Gertrude, Otto,
Why come they not ? I could have won to Prague
And back, in half the time. Why come they not ?
Good tidings find swift messengers. Alas !
I fear ; I fear.

Ernest. Shall I go seek them ?

Cunigunda. No.

The abyss, the dread abyss, where the old wall
Shelving, and steep, and crumbling, overhangs
The vale of Hirschberg from such dizzying height
As never plummet fathomed ;——that abyss—
Henry of Cassel there, and the good knight
Of Olmutz—Oh I have been cruel, Ernest,
And for my sins he'll die ! to punish me
He'll die ! he'll die !

Enter GERTRUDE.

Gertrude. Lady——

Cunigunda. Why dost thou pause?

Ernest. See how she pants! she's breathless.

Cunigunda. Is there any
Panting and breathless save myself? He's dead!
I see it in her face.

Gertrude. He hath safely passed
The abyss.

Cunigunda. Now thanks to Heaven! The dread
abyss.

He's safe! he's safe! Thou shalt be portioned, Gertrude.
He's safe!

Ernest. Yet that wide leap from tower to tower
Where Rudolf of Thuringia——

Cunigunda. Out on thee,
Raven!

Ernest. That fearful leap, with scarce a ledge
Where steed——

(Shouts without.)

Cunigunda. What means that cry ?

Re-enter OTTO and EDITHA.

Editha, Otto,

What means that cry ?

Editha. He's safe! The leap is past ;

The falcon knight is safe !

Ernest. Look to her !

Cunigunda. Nay

I'm well. Say o'er again !

Editha. The leap is past.

The falcon knight is safe.

Cunigunda. My Editha,

Ask what thou wilt of me. Was ever woman

So blest before ! The falcon knight is mine,

Mine own, and I am his. Oh, thanks to Heaven !

Now, ye that called my vow cruel and rash,

What say ye now ?

Ernest. Alas, dear lady, still

I grieve for them that——

Cunigunda. Talk not of them. Think

What were a thousand such as they, compared
With the bold falcon knight !—Editha, Gertrude,
Albert will come to claim his bride ; wipe off
These blistering tears, braid this dishevelled hair,
Adjust my wimple and my veil ;—my knight
Will come to claim his bride.

Enter SIR ALBERT and a PAGE.

He comes ! away !

I was a fool to think of vanity ;
He will not love his Cunigunda less
That she hath lain on the stone floor in prayer
And tearful agony, whilst he hath dared
This perilous deed.—Albert !

Albert (to a page.) Lead Saladin

Gently around the court. He trembles still
At the o'ermastered danger.

Cunigunda. Albert !

Albert (still to the page.) Loosen

The foaming bit. It is a matchless steed.

Cunigunda. Oh matchless! matchless! I myself
would be

His groom. But Albert!—

Albert. When he's cooler, bid

Thy comrade, Jerome, ride him back to Prague.

Bring thou another courser straight. The day

Wears on.

[*Exit PAGE.*]

Cunigunda. Sir Albert!

Albert. Madam!

Cunigunda. Hast thou not

A word for Cunigunda? Dost thou stand

There, like some breathing marble in thy cold

Stern haughty beauty, mute and motionless,

With arms close-folded and down-gazing eyes,

No thought for Cunigunda, not a word

For her whom thou hast won, not even a look?

Dost thou not claim me, Albert?

Albert. Lady, no;

I have a wife——ay, start and tremble ! turn
As pale as winter snows ! feel every pang
That thou hast caused and scorned !——I have a wife,
A sweet and gracious woman ; beautiful
Beyond all beauty, for the blush of love
The smile of kindness, and the dancing light
Of those joy-kindling eyes in whose bright play
The innocent spirit revels, blend their spell
With features delicate as lily bells,
A shape more graceful than the clustering vine.
Talk of thy stately charms ! At Ida's side
Thou would'st shew coarse and sunburnt, as the brown
And rugged elm beside the shining beech.——
Ay, shrink and tremble ! hide thy burning cheeks
Within thy quivering hands !——Wilt thou hear more ?——
This lovely loving wife, my three years' bride
And twice a mother,—Oh none ever bent
With such a grace as she o'er sleeping babes,
Nor ever youthful mother bent o'er babes
So like the Cherubim !——This wife, so fair,

So sweet so womanly, whose pitying heart
Would ache to see a sparrow die, this wife
I love.

Cunigunda. Why then——Oh cruel !

Albert.

Dar'st thou talk

Of cruelty, proud murderess, whose meed
For true-love hath been death ? Whose sinful vow
Slew the most gracious boy of all the earth,
The hope and pride and joy of his high line
Young Rudolf of Thuringia, my dear brother,
My dear and only brother ?

Ernest.

'Tis Duke Albert !

Yet pity her ! See how she smites her brow,
And tears her raven hair !

Albert.

Where was her pity

When that fair boy—Murderess, 'tis Rudolf's brother
That speaks to thee. When first I heard that tale,
Several revenges, deadly, bloody, fierce,
All that the body can endure of keen
And lengthened agony, the rack, the wheel,

The stake rushed through my brain, but they had been
A poor and trivial vengeance, all unmeet
For such o'erwhelming wrong ; my cunning hate
Hath found a more enduring curse. Thou lov'st me,
Thou lov'st me, Cunigunda, with the hot
Wild passion of thy nature, and I scorn thee !
Thou art contemned and loathed by whom thou lov'st ;
Won and abandoned ; spurned and thrown aside
Like an infected garment. The plague spot
Of sin is on thee, woman ; blackest shame
Shall follow like thy shadow. 'Twas for this
I donned the mask of courtship ; for this trained
My faithful steed. Thy worthless hand is mine——
Nay touch me not, hang not about my knees——
Mine to bestow. Some horse-boy of my train
Shall prove thy fitting partner.

Editha.

Oh for pity !

For manly pity, good my lord, break not
The bruised flower !

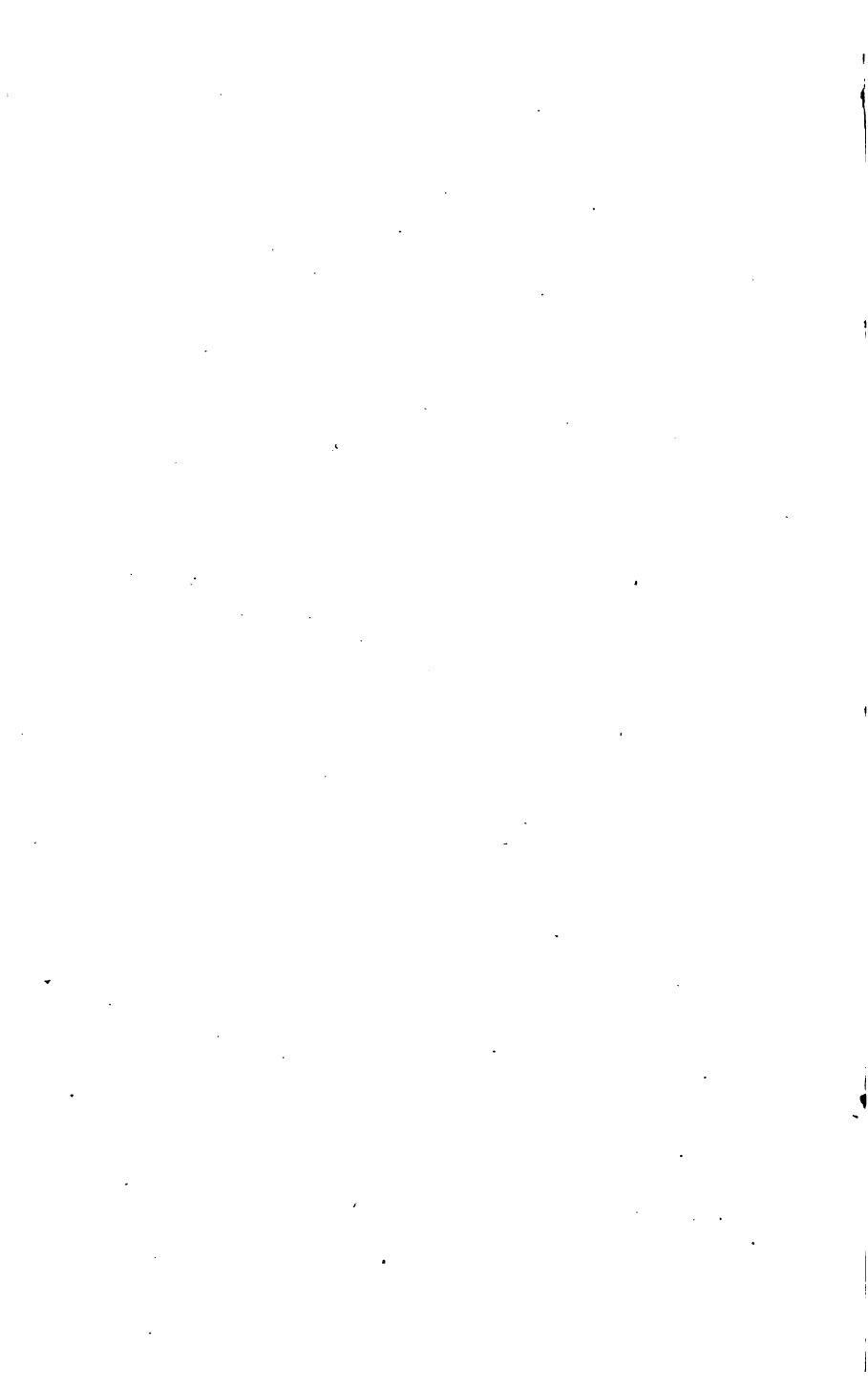
Cunigunda.

Be silent, Editha !

I have deserved all evil. Deal with me
Even as thou wilt, Duke Albert. I've deserved
Thy hate—but soon my heart—my bursting heart—
Deal with me as thou wilt. 'Twill not be long!

Albert. Nay then—Rise, Cunigunda! Lift thy face
From off the ground and listen. I'll not break
The bruised flower. Live and repent. In prayer
And pious penance live. The cloister cell
Were thy meet refuge. By to-morrow's dawn
Go join the Carmelites at Prague. For them
Who died untimely, for thyself, for me
And for my children, pray!——Now home, Sir Page!
My steed! my steed!

[*Exeunt.*



THE FAWN.

A DRAMATIC SCENE.

The story of this little Drama is taken, with some variation in the scene and catastrophe, from the beautiful ballad entitled *Fause Foodrage*, in the Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border.

CHARACTERS.

COUNTESS LINDORF.

BERTHA.

LEOPÖLD.

CONRADE.

FREDERICK.

SCENE, *a Forest in Bohemia;—a Castle in the back-ground.*

THE FAWN.

LEOPOLD *alone.*

Leopold. Lie there, dark murderous weapon! I
renounce thee!

Farewell, ye barbarous sports! Alas, poor fawn!

Enter BERTHA.

Bertha. Did I not hear a gun? The poor, poor fawn
Licking its bleeding mother! This is cruel.

Leopold. Oh cruel! cowardly! Never again——
I hate my treacherous skill; I hate myself.

Bertha. Look how the poor fawn with his nudging
nose

And pretty stamping feet, dabbled in blood,

Tries to awake his dam! How piteously
He moans, poor spotted thing! Art thou quite sure
The doe is dead? I thought I saw her move.

Leopold. Too sure. 'Twas not her motion; that
fond thing

Striving—I cannot bear to look on them!
She is too surely dead; when I came up
I found her dying; her fine delicate limbs
Trembling with the death-shiver. She scarce breathed;
But the pure instinct of maternal love
Struggled to keep in life. She fixed her sad
Affectionate eyes upon her young one's face,
Then moaning over her as now he moans,
Stretched out her feet, and died. Oh, lady Bertha,
Man is the wilder brute!

Bertha. But thou art grieved
And knew'st not—No, I'm sure thou ne'er didst dream
Of this poor fawn?

Leopold. No; it lay sleeping there
Behind the bushes. But a savage heart

Was mine, that could even here—Look round thee, lady !
There is not in the forest such a spot
As this. Look how the wood-walks hither tend,
As to a centre : some in vistas green,
Pillared and overarched, as the long aisles
Of an old proud cathedral ; others wandering
In lovelier mazes through a various scene
Holly or copse-wood ; scarce the eye can trace
Their coy meanders, but all meeting here
Beneath this monarch oak, through whose thick boughs
The sun comes flickering. How the indented leaves
Of brightest green cut clearly the blue sky
And the small clouds ! And how this tiny spring
Bubbles and sparkles round the moss-grown roots,
Winding its silver thread along the short
Elastic turf, so thickly set with flowers,
And mixed with fragrant herbs, till it is lost
Amongst the bowery thickets ! Not a spot
In all the forest can compare with this,
Nature's own temple ! And that delicate thing

Made up of innocence, and love, and fear,
And trembling happiness, most beautiful
Of all this beauty, she, who stood enjoying,
With a sweet peaceful spirit, drinking in
This flood of bliss,—that I—I hate myself!
And thou must hate me, lady.

Bertha.

Oh ! no ; no ;

Thou art so sorry !

Leopold.

'Tis my father's fault :

He keeps me here, waging unequal war
With these poor harmless deer, when I should be
Armed in the desperate strife, stemming the tide
Of glorious battle, winning death or fame.

Bertha. That were a strange place to learn gentleness!

Leopold. The only place for me. Oh, I must forth
Into the stirring world ! I have wild dreams
Which I would fain make real ; daring thoughts
Which must be turned to action ; hopes which soar
High as the eagle's wing ; all madness now——
But——Lady Bertha, I have basked too long

In the bright blaze of beauty ; I have gazed
Unseen, unknown as our poor forest cot
Looks upward on thy castle. I must gain
A name, or die. A glorious name!

Bertha. Nay, Leopold ——

Leopold. She knows me !

Bertha. Leopold ——

Leopold. Oh now that name
Is precious to my heart ! Thou know'st me lady ?

Bertha. Think'st thou I thus had spoken with a
stranger ?

I've often seen thee at our early mass,
And sometimes from the ramparts ; and besides
My own dear mother oft times talks of thine ——
Her faithful favourite maid.

Leopold. She was her maid ;
Her favourite maid. Oh I had not forgotten.

Bertha. And of thy father, her kind faithful friend
That old and reverend man, whose shining hairs,
Whiter than ermine, so become his bright

And healthful cheek. How much I love to see him!
How much I wish to know him! My dear mother
Talks oftentimes of him. Aye, and of thee—
Oftenest I think of all. Dost thou not know
That I'm thy foster-sister? That one breast—
Alas, that breast is cold!—nourished us both?
And that we should be friends? Oh I have longed,
Even in the holy chapel, to say this;
But my stern uncle——

Leopold. Kindest, loveliest maid!
How well that heart is mated to that face!
And does the gentle Countess speak of me—
That beautiful grief? Yes, I have often seen,
Have often felt those dewy eyes where love
Mixes with pity as in angel's looks,
Fixed upon mine, as she would read my soul.
Oh! she would find it full of deep respect
For her—and for her daughter.

Bertha. Leopold,
Look! the poor fawn hath moaned himself to sleep!

Give him to me, I, captive though I be,
Or little better in those frowning walls,
Yet have I there a lone deserted nook
Which long neglect hath made a sort of garden ;
All clothed with moss, and grass, and trailing plants
And decked with gorgeous weeds. The wild vine there,
And white veined ivy form a natural arbour ;
And I have mingled odorous shrubs, and sprinkled
Bright showers of garden blossoms. It is now
A bower fit for the fairies ; and unclaimed
Of any other I still call it mine ;
And there my pretty fawn shall dwell with me
And feed on roses ;—my poor dappled fawn !
No ; not in thine arms. Give him into mine.

Leopold. Nay, let me carry him !

Bertha.

Oh ! no, no, no ;

I must not ; dare not.

Leopold.

Only to the gate.

Bertha. The gate ! Then I must tell my truant tale,
Must own my wanderings. First put down the fawn.

I know not why—but, Leopold, I feel
As if I had done wrong—as if—and yet
I'm sure I meant no harm. Let us sit here
On these soft mossy roots. It is, indeed,
A chosen spot! Well, Leopold, thou know'st
That my good father died ere I was born,
A luckless girl! and that his castle, lands,
Titles and vassals, to his brother fell,
And I, amongst the rest, his infant ward.
With my dear mother I have lived with him
In a most strict seclusion—prisoners
In every thing but name! For eighteen years,
All my short life, we ne'er have passed the gate.

Leopold. Villain! base cowardly villain! Soon a
time

Shall come——Go on sweet lady!

Bertha. She still mourning

Her lord's untimely death; and I——

Leopold. Oh villain

That drink'st the orphan's tears! A time shall come——

Bertha. Nay, peace ; I prythee, peace ; I still content—

Content is not enough !—I still as happy
As a young bird.

Leopold. Happy ! with that fierce tyrant,
That stern oppressor !

Bertha. He was sometimes kind
And my dear mother always. All the house
Was good and kind to me—too good ! too kind !
Oh ! there is in man's heart a fathomless well
Of goodness ! I had nought but gratitude,
And yet how kind they were ! Content and happy
Was I ; yet sometimes an unbidden thought
Sprang up—a hope—a wish—an earnest wish !
A powerful passionate hope ! We had a maid
Bred in the forest,—a young innocent girl,
Who pined for trees, and air, and liberty,
Even till she sickened, and her round red cheeks
Grew thin and pale ; and books, dear books ! they all
Of freedom spake and nature ; and the birds

That eddied round our windows, every song
Called me to lovely nature ; till I longed
Intensely, as the schoolboy yearns for home,
To cast aside only for once the walls
Of our old castle, and to feel green leaves
About me, and to breathe the pleasant air,
Freshened with wilding flowers and dewy grass
And warmed by the bright sun.

Leopold. And did the Count
Refuse thee, lady ?

Bertha. Yes.

Leopold. But they, his vassals?
Surely one only man of all the world
Could utter *no* to thee?

Bertha. I asked them not.
Have I not said that they were good and kind,—
Kindest to me? And could I tempt them on
To possible punishment.

Leopold. Punished for thee !
Oh ! what a bliss !—But thou art here ?

Bertha.

I found

The lone deserted court I called my garden,
And dressed my bower, and tried to trifle thus
My bootless wish away :—But still it clung !
And one day following, with my eye, my heart,
A ring-dove hastening to her woodland nest,
Wishing I too had wings, I marked how low
In that dark angle was the ruined wall,
Covered with clustering ivy and o'erhung
By an old ash. And almost with the thought,
The ivy boughs my ladder, and the ash
My friendly veil, I climbed the wall and came
Down on the other side, a safe descent,
Propped by the uneven trunk ;—and there I stood
Panting with fear and joy at liberty !
Yet was I so o'ermastered by my fear,
That for that day I could not move a step
Into the forest ; but crept trembling back—
And wept as if for grief. Often since then,
When the Count Lindorf is abroad, as now

That he lies sick at Prague, I venture forth
As fearless as a dove.

Leopold. And still unmarked ?

Bertha. The sheltering forest reaches to the wall—
Look, 'tis close by!—I never have seen trace
Of man but once ; then thou wast reading here :
I had resolved if ever I should meet
Thee, or thy good old father, to accost ye ;
Yet when I saw thee here—I know not how—
But my heart failed me, and I fled. I wonder
At to-day's courage ; but the poor, poor fawn—
I only thought of him. Well, I must hence ;
My mother else may miss me.

Leopold. Then the Countess
Knows not this path ?

Bertha. No ; her sweet gentle spirit
Is cast in a too anxious mould ; she fears
For all she loves. No ; I have never told her.
But now that we—and she must see my fawn !
Aye—and she ought to know.

Leopold:

And when she knows—

Oh, lady, I shall never see thee more!

Bertha. Yet I must tell her—Surely I must tell her!

She is my own most dear and loving mother:—

Ought I not, Leopold ?

Leopold.

Lady thou should'st ;

Though it will root from out my heart a hope

Deeper than life ; thou should'st. .

Bertha.

Give me the fawn !

And, Leopold, stay here. I think—I hope

That she will wish to see thee. If she should——

Come not with me. Be sure to stay just here.

Farewell !—Nay, struggle not, my pretty fawn!

Thou must along with me.—Farewell!

[*Exit* BERTHA.]

Leopold.

Farewell,

Loveliest and most beloved ! Well might she wish

To tread the woodland path,—light-footed maid !

How beautiful she is, with her white arms

Wound round her innocent burthen, and her head

Bent over his so lulling! Even he,
That wild and timorous creature, feels the charm,
And is no more afraid. She disappears ;—
I scarce distinguish now her floating veil
And her brown waving hair. How beautiful!
How graceful! Most like one of Dian's nymphs
But full of deeper tenderness. Her voice,
Her words still linger round me like the air,
The dewy sunny air of which she spake,
Glowing and odorous. Oh! that I were—
And I will be. Yes, loveliest, most beloved,
I will deserve thee! I will make my name,
My humble lowly name, worthy to join
With thine, sweet Lady Bertha!—Hapless thing,
Thy gay compeers may bound at peace for me;
I shall seek braver fields. For thee, poor doe,
I will go bury thee deep in yon dell.
Should she return,—and will she then return?
How my heart throbs to know.

Enter CONRADE.

Conrade.

Surely I saw

Some bright and lovely maiden flitting by
Close to the castle wall. Along this path
She must have come. Or was it but the vision
That fills my dreams by night, my thoughts by day,
The bright and lovely form ?—Ha, Leopold !
Hast thou seen here a woman, a fair woman ?

Leopold. She has just parted hence, the Lady Bertha.

Conrade. Bertha ! Oh I must see, must follow her !

Leopold. Nay, 'tis too late. Ere now she's in the
Castle.

She will return.

Conrade. Oh, wondrous, wondrous chance !

The Lady Bertha !—Did she speak to thee ?

What seems she, Leopold ? Gay, gentle, kind,

Her mother was. Oh, tell me of her, boy !

Leopold. Father, I must to the wars.

Conrade.

Tell me of *her* !

Leopold. I must go win a name.

Conrade. Well ! Well ! thou shalt.

Talk to me now of Bertha !

Leopold. This is Bertha !

Why war and fame and life they are all Bertha !

Nothing but Bertha !—Oh, I love her, father,

Madly and wildly. She is my whole world,

Rip up my heart and you will find all Bertha ;

And I will wed her. I must to the wars

And earn her love. Nay, shake not thus thy head.

Though she be great and I be lowly, father,

I tell thee I will make a glorious name,

Or die.

Conrade. This is most wondrous. But the Count—
Count Lindorf ?

Leopold. Oh ! true love is strong and mighty ;
Pride bends before it.

Conrade. Were it pride alone !
Count Lindorf, as I hear, would rather see
The Lady Bertha in a convent cell

Than wedded. He is dark and dangerous,
And full of fears. Men say—

Leopold. Speak on, speak on.

What say they, father?

Conrade. Dark and dangerous
A fierce and gloomy—Nay, no more of this.
Whither dost drag that doe?

Leopold. To bury it
Far from her sight; she will be here anon.
She fain would know thee, and she speaks of thee
So reverently! In truth she is as humble
As a poor village maiden; yet as gracious
As a born princess. I shall soon return.
Stay, dearest father, lest she come the while;
She fain would see thee.

[*Exit LEOPOLD.*]

Conrade. Oh if she could know,
Could feel, could share—Be still, my beating heart!
Thou shalt not master me, be still!—She comes,
The beautiful! the kind!—Oh, that I dared—

Enter COUNTESS LINDORF and BERTHA.

Bertha. This is the spot I'm sure; but where is he?

Conrade. These are the first words I have heard her
speak

In all my life! How mine ear drinks her voice!

The Countess too!

Countess. Conrade, my kindest friend!

My faithfullest! my best! How many cares

Have made me old since in thy parting tears

I said Farewell to truth and honesty!

Conrade. My gracious lady!

Countess. Conrade, where is he?

Conrade. In yonder dell. She hath caught sight
of him.

Bertha. Ah, there he is burying the poor, poor doe!
I must go help him.

Countess. First come hither, Bertha.

This is my faithful friend—

Bertha. Leopold's father,

I know him well. He is no stranger, mother;

Why I have loved him ever since I saw
Those reverend hairs ; and he I'm sure loves me.
Dost thou not, Conrade ? See, he looks at me
With such a kindly gaze.

Conrade. How beautiful
She is ! What a bright smile lives in her eyes !
And see ! her soft white hand is dimpled o'er
Like a young babe's. Oh, take it not away,
That soft and dimpled hand !

Countess. No, rather give
Both hands, my Bertha. He's thy foster father.

Bertha. May I not call him father ? I, alas !
Have never known one.

Conrade. Blessings on thy head,
Beloved child !

Countess. Now, my own Bertha, go
And seek young Leopold, and bring him hither.
Nay, let her go !—

[*Exit BERTHA.*

Yes, Conrade, she is more

Than thy heart paints her : through these long, long years
My only comfort. She is all made up
Of sweet serene content ; a buoyant spirit
That is its own pure happiness. If e'er
Count Lindorf chide her—and, in sooth, even he
Can scarcely find a fault to blame in Bertha—
But should he chide her, she will meekly bend
For one short moment, then rise smiling up,
As the elastic moss when trampled on
By some rude peasant's foot. Never was heart
Stronger than her's in peaceful innocence.
Now speak of him.

Conrade. First, Madam, he loves her.
I knew it but to-day.

Countess. So ! She loves him,
And knows it not. But tell me of his temper.

Conrade. Kind, noble, generous, but all too hot :
Just like those bright black eyes, whose fiery flash
Kindling with living light, I've seen thee watch
With such a painful joy.

Countess. I have gazed on him
Till my eyes ached, till every sense was dazzled.
Yet with that fire there was a gentleness,
A softer, tenderer look. And still he knows not—
Conrade. I dare not trust him, lady. He already
Abhors Count Lindorf; he already longs
For war, for danger, for renown, for aught
That at the risk of life or limb may win
A name, a noble name.

Countess. A noble name !
He pants for that ! And I, that with a word—
Oh, may I ? dare I ?

Conrade. Noble lady, no.
The Count is dangerous, and this rash youth—

Countess. True ; true. And I expect my powerful
kinsman
The Baron Zutphen ; he shall hear my story,
My sad, sad story, Conrade. Oh, the strife
Of love so long pent in, so strong, so deep,
So gushing through the heart with bitter fear !

And I that ne'er have known the dear delight
To give him pleasure—Oh, to think that I
Could with a word, one word—I must away;
I dare not trust myself. Good Conrade help me
Back to the Castle.

Conrade. Rest thee here awhile,
Dear lady!—How she trembles!—Nay, sit down:
Command thyself.

Re-enter LEOPOLD and BERTHA.

Bertha. Mother!

Countess. Who called me mother?

Leopold. Let me support her. Lady, lean on me.

Countess. His very tone!

Bertha. How art thou, dearest mother?

Countess. Better.

Bertha. But still thou tremblest, and so pale!

Leopold. Oh, do not rise. Thou art too weak!

Countess. A strong

And a kind arm supports me.

Leopold. Never, Madam,
Was it so honoured. Would that all my life
Might pass as this brief moment !

Countess. Leopold
I think.

Leopold. And for my father's sake, perhaps—

Countess. Thy father ! Aye indeed thy father ! Leopold,
I have a boon to ask of thee.

Leopold. A boon !
Say, Madam, a command.

Countess. Well ! a command.
Conrade hath told me thou wilt to the wars ;
I have a powerful kinsman, young and brave,
High in the Emperor's favour ; I expect him
At Lindorf in the autumn. Be content
To wait his coming, and my first request
Shall be that he will guide thee in that path
Of stainless honour which himself hath trod.
Say, wilt thou wait till then ?

Every where vainly. I have that to tell

Which may not brook delay.

Countess.

Is the Count Lindorf

Returned ?

Frederick. My gracious lady, he is dead.

Conrade. Dead !

Frederick. Even so. Last night Count Lindorf
died.

Countess. No, no, he lives ! the real Count Lindorf lives !

My son ! my son ! my own, my very son !

Thou for whose sake I have endured to live

In prison and in sorrow—thou art mine,

My Leopold ! In the face of all the world

I will proclaim thee rightful Count of Lindorf.

Leopold. Mother ! I do not ask if this be real,

My heart hath always claimed thee. Yes ; I am

Thy son, thy very son.

Bertha.

And the poor Bertha—

What then is she ?

Countess. My daughter, still my daughter.

Leopold. Bertha my sister ?

Countess. No ; thy wife. Will that
Please thee as well ? And our dear Conrade's child.

Conrade. My own sweet child !

Countess. My son, thy speaking eyes
Demand my story. Briefly let me tell
A grief which eighteen years have left as fresh
As yesterday. Thy father was a man
Born to lead all hearts captive. Such he was
As thou art now. Look at the features, Frederick—
The shape, the air.

Frederick. It is his very self.

Countess. I loved him—we were in our bridal year—
Oh how I loved him ! So did all the world
Except his envious brother. They went forth
Together, at the break of day, to hunt
Here in this very forest ; and at eve
One—only one—returned. Mine—mine—O God !
The agony, the frightful agony
When he at last was brought—O God !

Leopold.

My mother !

Countess. Some tale was told of direful accident—
Would that I could believe ! But from that hour
Peace, rest, and appetite and natural smiles
Forsook the conscious fratricide—Oh guilt
Hath well avenged us ! But, ere yet the flush
Of bold triumphant crime had paled to fear,
And dark remorse, did Conrade overhear—
For I was great of thee, my Leopold,
And grief and horror had brought on my pains,—
This Lindorf bribe a ruffian to secure
My infant, if a male. Thou, sweetest Bertha,
A new-born innocent babe wast in the castle ;
And he, and my kind nurse, and she the kindest
And faithfullest of all, thy blessed mother,
Contrived, I scarcely conscious, to exchange
My boy for his fair girl.—A boundless debt
We owe thee, Conrade.

Conrade.

Pay it to my Bertha.

Leopold. She is herself that debt ! What was the life

Of fifty such as I, compared to Bertha ?

A paltry boon, scarce worth my thanks, dear father !

She is the treasure ! She —

Bertha.

Cease, flatterer, cease !

I must go tend my fawn.

Countess.

My son, I long

To see thee in thy castle.

Frederick.

Ye will find

The Baron Zutphen there to greet ye, Madam.

He came to proffer succour and protection

To thee and Lady Bertha ; he will now

Welcome his brave young kinsman. Not a heart,

Vassal or servant but will feel the joy

Of this discovery.

Countess.

Leopold, my son—

How proud I am of that unwonted word !

Let us go meet the Baron. Bertha, Conrade,

Daughter and friend, come with me ; this kind cousin

Must see how rich I am ! Mine own dear son !

THE WEDDING RING.

A DRAMATIC SCENE.



The old ballad of The Berkshire Lady, which recounts an adventure that actually happened above a century ago to one of the most respectable families in that county, is the origin of the following drama. The names and localities that I have chosen are of course fictitious.

CHARACTERS.

SIR EDWARD DELMONT.

ARTHUR DELMONT, *his brother.*

***The* LADY STANLEY.**

*Scene, a magnificent Saloon in the house of the Lady
Stanley near Reading.*

THE WEDDING RING.

SIR EDWARD DELMONT, *and* ARTHUR.

Sir Edward. Why thus amort, fair brother ? 'Tis
a rich

And princely hall, a palace-like demesne.
Seest thou yon stately oaks and those old thorns,
The growth of centuries, mingling their gay wreaths
Of pearly blossoms with the weeping spray
Of the light feathery birch, and darker shoots
Of shining holly, while amidst the fern
The dappled deer lie couching ? Art thou master
Of this fair seat ?

Arthur. I'faith I know not.

Sir Edward. 'Twas

A gay and glittering coach, drawn by four mares

Of the right Flanders breed, conveyed us hither ;
And she our fair companion mistress seemed
Of that proud equipage—the nameless she !

Arthur. Not wholly nameless,—Mary ;—the good
priest

Told us so far.

Sir Edward. And in so telling told
Full little. Mary ! commonest of sounds.
Name of all wear ! So doth the lordly Earl,
So the poor cobbler call his wife ; the princess
Within her stately bower, and the coarse drudge
That milks her kine, both answer to that name.
'Tis general as the violet, now lurking
Beneath the white-thorn hedge, now proudly placed
I' the garden's southern nook beside the rose.
She's Mary Delmont now. Dost shrink to hear
Those words conjoined ?

Arthur. Not I.

Sir Edward. Yet thou art sad
And silent, brother mine ; thy cheek is pale,

Thy fiery glance is quenched, and thy smooth brow
Contracted into lines of wrinkling care
Fitter for me thine elder; though I grant ye
The chances of this morning might perplex
Even my ripe wisdom. Wilt thou hear them? First
To abide a challenge at the rapier point,
The cause and challenge unknown; and then
Having with some small pain—for true men love not
To fight with shadows and for shadows!—having
Roused thy hot valour to that Quixote strain,
To find thy puissant adversary changed
To a fair damsel, who doth give thee choice
"Twixt two sharp hazards, wedlock or the sword;
To marry in a mask, thou know'st not whom;
To come home with thy bride thou know'st not where;
And when safe lodged within this goodly chamber
The bride to disappear thou know'st not how;
Whilst at short intervals come grinning knaves,
On thriftless errands bent, to trim the hearth
Or close the casement, and young tittering girls

Thrust giggling faces through half open doors,
And if we ask who brought us here? or where
We be, unlucky?—groom and maid burst forth
Into ungoverned laughter and so vanish.

Say I not sooth?

Arthur. 'Tis over true.

Sir Edward. And draws not

The day towards noon, whilst we have been astir
Since dawn, nor broke our fasts?

Arthur. Thrice happy thou

Whom such a grief can trouble!

Sir Edward. Nay, good brother

Thou know'st the proverb says that a full sorrow——

But trust me Arthur 'tis for thee I grieve:

I doubt the lady much.

Arthur. Yet this fair seat——

Sir Edward. Didst ever see that sport of Fletcher's
muse

The comic scene where Leon tames the pride
Of Margarita?

Arthur. Yes ; yes ; yes.

Sir Edward. And dost not

Remember how a cunning quean, in the absence
Of her rich mistress, cozened a gay gallant
To wed her ?

Arthur. Yes ; yes ; yes.

Sir Edward. And brought him home
Even to her lady's dwelling ?

Arthur. Yes I tell thee.

Beshrew thee, Edward, that hast put in words
The very thought that woke within my heart
Such torture ! To have wedded poverty,
Plain honest houseless poverty, were nothing,
Poor though I be, were nothing ! But a cheat,
A stale and common cheat ! perchance a lewd—
It cannot be, it shall not.

Sir Edward. I would fain

Prove an ill guesser. But what ground of faith
Hast thou ? Thou hast not seen her face, scarce e'en
Her bearing,—so the veil and mantle shrouded

A form of towering height ; thou hast not heard
Her voice, for surely, nay she owned as much,
Her very tone was feigned. Thou may'st have wedded
Old age and ugliness.

Arthur. She's young and fair ;
Of that be sure. Didst thou not see the white
Smooth dimpled hand, the taper fingers jewelled
Even to the joint, the slender wrist with veins
Meandering through its snow ? Never such hand
Pertained to aught save one as finely formed
As delicately reared. It trembled too,
That soft hand trembled and grew cold in mine
With fearful modesty, then warmed again
With love, quick fluttering love. Aye and athwart
Her very wildest speech, although the words
Were daring, and the purport rash and strange,
Yet was the manner soft and maidenly,
As of one born and nurtured in a pure
And gentle dignity, that dared the rather,
Because in her bold innocence she guessed not

The censure she provoked. I'll trust her still,
In all her mystery.

Sir Edward. Heaven send her true!
How wilt thou know her?

Arthur. By the very sign
We spake of; the fair hand.

Sir Edward. The hand! Why, Arthur,
Grant that the hand, so white and violet veined,
The small pink palm and taper fingers pass
For marks of beauty and of gentle blood;
Yet many a gentle dame hath one as fair
As——

Arthur. Pshaw, man! Pshaw! The ring! The
ring! Thou know'st
How unprepared we came for spousal rites,
But I by chance wore on my hand the gem,
Sir Rowland's legacy, his famous Psyche,
And in default of the plain golden round
I slid the storied onyx on her finger;—
Hark!

(One of the doors of the saloon is thrown open.)

Sure I heard light footsteps. Hark! Oh grant
It may be she, unmasked, unveiled, disclosed
In mind and person. Yet have I a fear
Of this strange meeting mingled with my hope.
Do thou accost her first.

*(Arthur retires to the window—Sir Edward remains in
the middle of the apartment.)*

Sir Edward. None enters.

Arthur. What!

Another mockery?

Sir Edward. No. I see her now,
Beyond the gothic portal, in the hall,
A noble lady, speaking with an air
Of mild command to her mute menial train.
Look! Thou may'st see her. Look!

Arthur. I dare not. Is't

The lady? Mine? Speak! Speak!

Sir Edward. I know not, Arthur,

In truth I know not. Yet it cannot be.

She, whom we saw, could never have concealed
That queenly shape, that goddess port.

Arthur.

Methought

She too was graceful.

Sir Edward. Why this is a Grace,

Or rather a young Juno. Even a goddess
Wanting the state imperial would lack somewhat
Of her calm majesty. How those dark curls,
Falling in their rich clusters evenly
Adown those damask cheeks and that slim throat
Of ivory, add to the placid grandeur
Of her fair face. Yet those large modest eyes
Have a quick brightness in them; a gay dimple
Plays round that finely chiselled mouth,—she's scarce
So awful as she seems.

Arthur.

How is she robed?

Like her——

Sir Edward. No! she was quaintly garmented
In weeds of grey and pink,—a shrouding mantle,
A black disfiguring mask, a floating veil:

This lady hath a rich yet simple robe,
Of whitest satin, a long ample robe,
Purpled with lace and brodered with rare pearls ;
Pearls round her fairer neck, and one white rose
Mixed with the ringlets whose luxuriant pride
The golden bodkin scarce restrains.

Arthur. The garb
Is bride-like.

Sir Edward. It but seems the meet array,
The every day attire of that young beauty.

Arthur. Her hand?

Sir Edward. Is gloved. Sure I have seen that face!

Was't in a picture ? or a dream ? No ! no !
I've seen her living self. 'Tis the rich heiress,
The Lady Stanley. Dost thou not remember
The good Lord Stanley, Arthur ? the old friend
Of our dear father ? Many a time and oft
Hast thou sate on his knee, a rosy boy,
Whilst he hath talked to thee of his fair girl,

His pretty black-eyed maid, and laughed to hear
How thou wouldst vow when grown into a man
That she—We were at Florence when he died ;
But two years since I saw, and scarcely saw,
At court the blooming heiress. 'Tis herself !
She comes. Stand not aloof, like village churl
From that rare beauty, Arthur.

Enter the LADY STANLEY.

Lady !

Lady.

Sirs,

I crave your pardon, if, as I have heard,
Ye have waited long untended. The bright sun
Tempted me forth amongst the flowers.

Sir Edward.

Thyself

A brighter, sweeter flower !

Lady.

Beseech ye, Sir,

Waiving all compliment to tell at once
Your errand hither. I should grieve to fail
In courtesy to men of gentle seeming ;

But being here a maiden and alone,
Rich therefore envied, young therefore exposed
To evil thoughts and evil tongues, it suits not
My state to harbour gallants such as ye
Within my house, unless indeed the occasion
May justify the visit. Seek ye ought
Of me or mine?

Sir Edward. Fair Madam, for myself
I well may answer, No. My brother yonder
Seeks, what full many a man hath vainly sought
Of the young Lady Stanley,—

Lady. Wherefore pause?
What seeks the gentleman?

Sir Edward. A wife, fair Madam!
A wife!

Lady. What mean ye, Sirs?

Arthur. Not to offend
Such beauty. Gentle lady, 'tis a tale,
So wild, so strange, so marvellously true,
I almost shame to tell it.

Sir Edward. Shall I spare
Thy blushes, Arthur ?

Lady. Nay, methinks the hero
Will prove the best narrator.

Sir Edward (aside). Say'st thou so ?

Lady. Pray ye, be seated, Sirs. Now to thy tale.

Arthur. Much may befall in few short hours. Last night
Whilst sojourning at Reading, thither called
With this my kindest brother to attend
A kinsman's bridal, and still lingering on
In that gay pleasant town, a thriftless truant
From law, dull law, and law's thrice dull abode
The silent Temple—Yesternight, returning
Merrily to our Inn, a tiny page
Slid in my hand a scroll and disappeared
Ere we could ask, Whence com'st thou ? 'Twas a cartel.

Lady. Alas !

Arthur. A challenge from some unknown foe
To meet him, hand to hand, and sword to sword,
At peep of day upon the Forbury Hill.

Lady. Alas! Alas! How wild is man! Unknown
too!

Didst thou attend his summons?

Arthur. Of a surety.

Lady. And he—?

Sir Edward. Aye now the marvel comes. Fair

Madam,

No He was there.

Arthur. On that small eminence

We met the dawn, and saw the morning mists

Rise from the valley of the Thames, disclosing

The dewy meadows, and the antique bridge,

And Caversham's white hills,—but foe saw none.

Lady. Perchance he had repented his rash challenge.

Sir Edward. Nay, lady, list the tale.

Arthur. Foe saw we none

Save a masked damsel pacing silently

Beneath the venerable trees, which wave

Their verdant plumage o'er the hill's steep brow.

Lady. A damsel! and was she the foe?

Sir Edward.

Good sooth

She's like to prove so.

Lady.

Sir!—Methinks thy brother

Can tell his tale without thine aid.—The Damsel?

Arthur. ♦ Paced to and fro, fair Madam. Once or
twice

Drew near, then back again, as awe or shame

Strove with some desperate purpose.

Lady.

Did she speak?

Arthur. At last with, as it seemed to me, a forced
And acted bravery, she drew a rapier
Forth from beneath her cloak, avowed herself
The challenger of yesternight, and then
In few, brief, hurried words gave me the choice
To fight her or to wed.

Lady.

Well, Sir!

Sir Edward.

Well, Madam!

In faith thou must accept my story, Lady,

Or else get none; he's silent from mere shame.

But canst thou—for all women have a gift

Of divination in man's weakness,—canst thou
Look in his face, nor read at the first glance
His answer ? “ Benedick the married man ”
Is stamped on every feature. Ah ! fool ! fool !

Arthur. Edward, beware lest this blunt mood of
thine

Carry thee past my patience.

Sir Edward. Art thou not

A fool ? And am not I a triple fool
To grieve o'er thy rank folly ?

Lady. But thy tale !

He wedded then with this unknown ?

Sir Edward. Despite

All counsel and all warning. Close at hand,
Stood Church and Priest and Clerk in due array
For his undoing. They were wedded, Lady,
In shorter space than I have known the gallant
Waste on the fashion of his doublet. Marry !
This garment is for life.

Lady. And she still masked ?

Sir Edward. Masked, nameless and unknown. At
the Church porch

Waited a gilded coach, which brought us straight
To this fair hall ; and the she Will-o'-the-wisp,
The female Jack-o-lantern, having lodged us
Safe in her cage, vanished through yonder door.

Lady. 'Tis a strange tale.

Sir Edward. A tale would make the fortune
Of a score of ballad-mongers, an 'twere but a thought
More credible. But, Madam, canst thou give
No help in this wild strait, no clue to trace
The run-away ? Hast thou no damsel errante,
No jill flirt in thy train were like to play
The bride in this adventure ? No pert quean
Of a waiting-woman, or wild wanton cousin
To cozen our young gallant ?

Lady. Out upon thee !

Thou art uncivil.

Sir Edward. Of a younger brother
He's none so poor ; and I, being, as thou seest,

A bluff, unnurtured bachelor, foredoomed
To break my neck in a fox chase, he may reckon
On my succession. Many a prim she-cousin,
The accustomed garnish of your noble tables,
That combs my lady's lap-dog, gathers scandal
For her diversion, is a skilful loser
At every game, a frontless flatterer
At every season, many such a pest,
However gently born, had dared this venture
For freedom and a husband.

Lady.

Once again

Thou art uncivil, Sir. Thank heaven my kindred
Are of a nobler temper.

Sir Edward.

My suspicions

Point to the waiting-damsel. Your poor kinswoman
Hath commonly a mincing delicate mien,
Compound of fear and pride. Hast thou no wild
Intriguess in thy train, whom love of gold—

Lady. Thou deemest that it must be love of gold?

Sir Edward. Madam, I do.

Lady. And thou ?

Arthur. I hope not so,
And as I hope, believe. Woman is generous,
Not mercenary.

Sir Edward. Man is vain. I hold that
'The truer axiom.

Lady. What did she resemble,
This truant bride ?

Sir Edward. A strapping quean ; as tall
As the great may-pole on the green ; as awkward
As ever danced the may-day round ; as pert—

Arthur. Hold ! hold, good brother. She was of a
height
Noble, sweet lady, as thine own ; as graceful
Almost as thy fine form ; and for her speech
'Twas frankness mixed with modesty. I trust
To find a virtuous wife.

Lady. A fair one too ?

Arthur. So please you, gracious Madam. Not per-
chance

What might seem fair by thee ;—full many a flower
Shews like a weed beside the rose.

Lady. And rich ?

Think'st thou to find her rich ?

Arthur. For that I care not

Howbeit she prove not mercenary.

Sir Edward. Tush !

If she be poor, how can she quit herself
Of that suspicion ?—Madam, once again,
Canst thou end our wild quest ?

Lady. How should I ! Masked—

And nameless !—Ye yourselves might meet this bride
And pass her by unknown.

Sir Edward. We have one token—

Arthur. A white and peerless hand.

Sir Edward. A peerless ring !

The hand was coarse and sunburnt, housewifely
And toil-stained,—but the ring ! an antique cameo,
A Psyche, a quaint butterfly, whose wings
Rather of gauze than stone seemed springing up

In act to fly, a piece of matchless art
Found mid the ruins of old Rome, and rated
Far above diamonds—To think that gem
Should deck some stale cheat's finger!

Lady (taking off her glove). Was the ring
Like this upon my hand?

Arthur. My bride! my wife!
Art thou indeed my wife?

Lady. In very sooth
No less.

Arthur. Sweet ring, I worship thee. My wife!
My beautiful! my true!

Lady (to Sir Edward). Now, heretic,
Was the masked bride a cheat?

Sir Edward. Fair Lady Stanley,
I cry you mercy!

Lady. Nay thou 'scapst not so—
Was she a cheat?

Sir Edward. My pretty sister, yes.
Not when she wore a mask on her bright face,

But when she doffed that mask, and strove to play
The stranger!—simpleton! as if each blush,
And downcast look, and sighing smile, and low
And faltering accent told not plain as words
Her secret.——Sister, were that lord of thine
Less than a miracle of modesty,
He must have known his bride. At the first glance
I saw the trick, and instantly resolved
To tease the teaser.

Lady. 'Twas a strange and bold
And venturous hazard;—but I long had heard
All good of Arthur Delmont: as a child
From my dear father; as a youth from friends
And kinsmen; and when I at last had seen,
Had loved, and knew not——'Twas unwomanly,
Unmeet; but ye shall see the wife redeem
The errors of the maid.

Arthur. O may I merit
Thy noble trust.

Sir Edward. It was a generous sin

And well may find forgiveness. Gentle madam,
I have a heavier charge. Here in thy house,
And on thy wedding-day—pray Heaven thou use not
To starve thy guests!—I, thy new husband's brother,
Am famished.

Arthur. Cannibal!

Lady. I cry you mercy!

But dinner——

Sir Edward. Breakfast, Lady Stanley! Breakfast!
I've tasted nought to-day. Lets in to breakfast
And talk at ease of this strange chance. Thy hand
Fair sister,—aye the ring becomes it well,—
The antique wedding ring, an emblem fit
Of happiness and love.—To breakfast, quick!

[*Exeunt.*



EMILY.

A DRAMATIC SCENE.

CHARACTERS.

LORD GLENTHAM.

AMELIA, *his daughter.*

MAURICE, *Amelia's husband.*

WILLIAM, *a boy of six years old, the son of Maurice
and Amelia.*

SCENE, *the inside of a cottage.*

EMILY.

Amelia, at work, singing ; Maurice enters during her song.

SONG.

The sun is careering in glory and might ,
'Mid the deep blue sky and the cloudlets white ;
The bright wave is tossing its foam on high,
And the summer breezes go lightly by ;
The air and the water dance, glitter and play——
And why should not I be as merry as they ?

The linnet is singing the wild wood through ;
The fawn's bounding footstep skims over the dew ;

The butterfly flits round the flowering tree ;
And the cowslip and blue-bell are bent by the bee.
All the creatures that dwell in the forest are gay—
And why should not I be as merry as they * ?

Amelia. Ah ! art thou there ? I thought I was
alone.

Hast thou been long returned ?

Maurice. Even now.

Amelia. I'm glad ;

For I would feel thy presence,—as I used
When I, a conscious girl, if thou didst come
Behind my chair, knew thee without the aid
Of eye or ear. A wife's love is as strong,
Her sense should be as quick.

Maurice. But maiden love
Is mixed with shame, and doubt, and consciousness,

* This song has been very beautifully set to music by my young friend, Mr. Charles Packer, one of the most distinguished and promising pupils of the Royal Musical Academy.

Which have a thousand eyes, a thousand ears.
Amelia, thou art pale. Nay, if thou smilest
Thou wilt be pale no longer : thy rich smile
Is fitly wedded to a varying blush,
That flutters tremulously in thy fair cheek,
Like shivering wings of new-caught butterflies.
Ah, there it is !

Amelia. Flatterer !

Maurice. But thou wast pale
Stooping so long o'er that embroidery,
That irksome toil. Go forth into the air.

Amelia. Not yet ; there still is light enough to work ;
I have one flower to finish. Then I'll fly
To the sweet joys of busy idleness,
To our sweet garden. I am wanted there—
So William says ; the freshening showers to-day
Have scattered my carnations ; I must raise
Their clear and odorous beauties from the dark
Defiling earth.

Maurice. That task is done.

Amelia.

By thee ?

After thy hard day's toil ? Oh what a fond
And foolish lover-husband I have got !
Art thou not weary ?

Maurice. Only just enough

To feel the comfort, sweetest, of repose ;
Of such repose as this, here at thy feet
Extended, and my head against thy knee.

Amelia. Even as that sweet and melancholy prince,
Hamlet the Dane, lay at Ophelia's feet
His lady-love. Wast thou not thinking so ?

Maurice. I was.

Amelia. And I was likening thee to one—
Dost thou remember—'tis the prettiest moment
Of that most marvellous and truest book—
When her so dear Sir Charles at Harriet's feet
Lay turning up his bright face smilingly *.
Dost thou remember ?

Maurice.

Banterer ! Where is William ?

* Sir Charles Grandison, vol. vi.

Amelia. That is a secret. Do not question me,
Or I shall tell. He will be shortly back.

(*Sings.*)

The linnet is singing the wild wood through,
The fawn's bounding footstep skims over the dew ;
The butterfly flits round the flowering tree ;
And the cowslip and blue-bell are bent by the bee.
All the creatures that dwell in the forest are gay—
And why should not I be as merry as they ?
And why should not I be as merry as they ?

Maurice. How much thou lov'st that song !

Amelia. He loves it so,

Our William : if far off within the wood
He do but catch one clear and ringing note
Of that wild cheerful strain, he scuds along
With his small pretty feet, like the young brood
Of the hen-partridge to her evening call.

Maurice. Well but where is he ?

Amelia.

Guess.

Maurice.

Nay, tell me, love.

Amelia. To-day at noon, returning from the farm,
Where on some trifling errand I had sent him,
He left the path in chase of that bright insect
The burnished dragon-fly, with net-work wings
So beautiful. His shining guide flew on,
Tracing the channel of the rippling spring
Up to its very source. There William lost him :
But looking round upon that fairy scene
Of tangled wood and babbling waters clear,
He found a fairy carpet ; strawberries
Spread all about, in a rich tapestry
Of leaves and blushing fruit : and he is gone,
With his own basket that his father made him,
His own dear father, to bring home his prize
To that dear father.

Maurice. Prythee, love, say on ;

This is a tale which I could listen to
The livelong day.

Amelia. And will it not be sweet
To see that lovely boy, blushing all over,
His fair brow reddening, and his smiling eyes
Filling with tears, his scarlet lips far ruddier
Than the red berries, stammering and forgetting
The little pretty speech that he hath conned,
But speaking in warm kisses? Will it not
Be sweet to see my precious William give
The very first thing he can call his own
To him who gives him all? My dearest husband,
Betray me not. Pretend an ignorance;
And wonder why that cream and bread stand there,
And why that china bowl. Thy precious boy!

Maurice. *Thy* precious boy! *Amelia* that child's
heart
Is like thee as his face.

Amelia. Liker to thee
Are both—our blessing! What a world of love
Dwells in that little heart!

Maurice. Too much! too much!

He is too sensitive. I would he had
An airy playmate full of mirth and jests.

Amelia. Nature's his playmate ; leaves and flowers
and birds

And the young innocent lambs are his companions ;
He needs no other. In his solitude
He is as happy as the glittering beetle
That lives in the white rose. My precious boy!

Maurice. What are these ? Tears ! My own
Amelia,

Weep'st thou for happiness ? What means this rain
That falls without a cloud ? Fy ! I must chide thee.

Amelia. Yes ; thou art right. Useless, not cause-
less, tears !

They will have way. Forgive me, dearest husband !
This is our wedding-eve. Seven years ago
I stole, a guilty wanderer, from my home,—
My old paternal home !—and with the gush
Of motherly love, another thought rushed in—
My father !

Maurice. My Amelia !

Amelia. Seven years

Have past since last I saw him ;—and that last !
The pangs of death were in my heart, when I
Approached to say, Goodnight ! He had been harsh
All day ; had pressed Sir Robert's odious love,
Had taunted at thy poverty—my Maurice !
But suddenly, when I all vainly tried
To falter out, Goodnight, in his old tone
Of fond familiar love, and with the name
Which from his lips seemed a caress, he said,
God bless you, Emily ! That blessing pierced
My very soul. Oft in the dead of night
I seem to hear it. Would he bless me now ?
Oh no ! no ! no !

Maurice. My own beloved wife
Think not too deeply. There will come a time——

Amelia. Oh Maurice ! all the grandeur that she left,
The splendid vanities, ne'er cost thy wife
A sigh, contented in her poverty,

Happy in virtuous love. But that kind voice,
That tender blessing, that accustomed name
Of fondness!—Oh! they haunt my very dreams;
They crowd upon my waking thoughts; then most
When some sweet kindness of my lovely boy,
Some sign of glorious promise, tells my heart
How little I deserve——

Maurice.

My Emily!

Amelia. No, not from thee, not even from thee that
name.

'Tis sacred to those dear and honoured lips
That ne'er will breathe it more. I am ungrateful
Thus to repine, whilst thou and our dear boy——
Where can he now be loitering? These dark clouds
Portend a storm.

Maurice.

Already the large drops
Come pattering on the vine leaves. I will seek——

Enter WILLIAM.

Amelia. He's here. My William, wherefore didst
thou stay

So long ? and where's the basket ?

William.

Kiss me first.

Amelia. Now, where's the basket ?

William. I had filled it half,

When a strange gentleman came through the wood

And sat down by me.

Amelia.

Did he eat the strawberries ?

William. Dear mother, no. He talked to me, and
then

I could not gather them.

Amelia.

What said he, dearest ?

William. He asked my name and your's, and where
I dwelt,

And kissed me.

Amelia.

And what else ?

William.

Called me dear boy,

Said that a storm was coming on, and asked

If I would go with him.

Maurice.

Ha ! what said'st thou

To that, my William ?

William. No. But then I prayed him
To come with me to my dear home. Look there !
Do you not see that tall man in the porch,
His head against the woodbine ? That is he.

Amelia. Dear Maurice, bring him in.

[*Exit MAURICE.*

William. I am so sorry
That it is grown so dark, you will not see
What a sweet face he has. Only he's older,
I think he's like you, mother ; and he kissed me
As you do now, and cried.

Amelia. Oh can it be—

Re-enter MAURICE with LORD GLENTHAM.

Lord Glen. If I intrude—

Amelia. That voice ! Oh father ! father !
Pardon ! Oh pardon !

Lord Glen. Madam !—

Amelia. I'm your daughter—
Call me so, father ! for these seven long years

I have not seen your face. Disown me not !
Call me your daughter ! Once from your dear lips
Let me hear that dear sound ! Call me your Emily,
And bless my dear, dear child ! For such a blessing
I'd be content to die. William, kneel here ;
Hold up your innocent hands.

Lord Glen.

Rise, Madam ; rise.

Amelia. Oh call me once your daughter, only once,
To still my longing heart ! My William, pray
For your poor mother.

William.

Oh forgive us, Sir,

Pray, pray forgive us !

Lord Glen.

Madam, I have sought

A half hour's shelter here from this wild storm ;
And, as your guest, I pray you to forbear
These harrowing words. I am but lately risen
From a sick bed.

Maurice. My wife, compose thyself,

Retire awhile.

[*Exit* AMELIA.]

Please you to sit my lord.

Lord Glen. I thank you, Sir.—You have a pleasant
cottage,

Prettily garlanded with rose and woodbine
And the more useful vine. Has it been long
Your home ?

Maurice. Five years.

Lord Glen. You have left the army ?

Maurice. Yes.

There was no chance of war ; nor could I drag
My sweet Amelia through the homeless wanderings
Of a poor soldier's life. This is a nest,
However lowly, warm and full of love
As her own heart. Here we have been most happy.

Re-enter AMELIA, with a light and a basket.

Maurice (meeting her). Thou tremblest still.

Amelia. I could not stay away.

It is such joyful pain to look upon him ;
To hear his voice ;—I could not stay away.
William, there is thy basket. Offer it.

Lord Glen. No, my dear boy.

Amelia. Now blessings on his head

For that kind word !

Lord Glen. Surely she was not always
So thin and pale !—Your husband says, Amelia,
That you are happy.

Amelia. I have only known
One sorrow.

Lord Glen. Ye are poor.

Amelia. Not that ! not that !

Lord Glen. You have implored my blessing on your
son ;—

I bless him.

Amelia. On my knees I offer up
My thanks to Heaven, and thee. A double blessing
Was that, my father ! on my heart it fell
Like balm.

Lord Glen. I will do more. Give me that boy,
And he shall be my heir. Give me that boy.

Amelia. My boy ! Give up my boy !

Lord Glen. Why he must be,
A burthen. Ye are poor.

Amelia. A burthen ! William !
My own dear William !

Lord Glen. Miserably poor
Ye are. Deny it not.

Maurice. We earn our bread
By honest labour.

Amelia. And to work for him
Is such a joy ! My William, tremble not !
Weep not, my William ! Thou shalt stay with me
Here on my lap, here on my bosom, William !

Lord Glen. Why thou may'st have another child,
and then—

Amelia. Oh never one like this—this dearest child
Of love and sorrow ! Till this boy was born
Wretchedly poor we were ; sick, heartsick, desolate,
Desponding ; but he came, a living sunbeam !
And light and warmth seemed darting through my
breast,



With his first smile. Then hope and comfort came,
And poverty, with her inventive arts,
A friend, and love, pure, firm enduring love ;
And ever since we have been poor and happy :
Poor ! no, we have been rich ! my precious child !

Lord Glen. Bethink thee for that child, Amelia,
What fortunes thou dost spurn. His father's love
Perhaps is wiser.

Amelia. Maurice, say.

Maurice. My lord,

'Tis every whit as fond. You have my thanks.
But in a lowly station he may be
Virtuous and happy.

William. Mother, let me stay
And I will be so good.

Amelia. My darling, yes ;
Thou shalt not leave me, not for the wide world.

Lord Glen. Thou need'st not clasp him so against
thy bosom ;
I am no ruffian, from a mother's breast

To pluck her child.—Amelia, as his arms
Wind round thy neck, so thou a thousand times
Hast clung to mine ; as on his snowy brow
Thy lips are sealed, so mine a thousand times
Have prest thy face ; with such a love, Amelia,
As thou dost feel for him.

Amelia. Oh father ! father !

Lord Glen. Thou wert a motherless babe, and I to thee
Supplied both parents. Many a night have I
Hung over thy sick bed, and prayed for thee
As thou dost pray for him. And thou, Amelia,
Didst love me then.

Amelia. Did love ! Oh never, never
Can such love pass away ! 'Tis twined with life.

Lord Glen. Then after eighteen years of tender care,
Fond hopes, and fonder fears, didst thou not fly
From me, thy father, with a light gay youth,
A love of yesterday ? Didst thou not leave me
To die of a broken heart ? Amelia, speak !
Didst thou not ?

Amelia. Father! this is worse than death.

Lord Glen. Didst thou not? Speak.

Amelia. I did. Alas! I did.

Lord Glen. Oh miserably have my days crept on
Since thou didst leave me! Very desolate
Is that proud splendid home! No cheerful meals;
No evening music; and no morning rides
Of charity or pleasure. Thy trim walks
Are overgrown; and the gay pretty room,
Which thou didst love so well, is vacant now;
Vacant and desolate as my sick heart.
Amelia, when thou saw'st me last, my hair
Was brown as thine. Look on it now, Amelia.

Maurice. My lord, this grief will kill her. See, she
writhes

Upon the floor.

Lord Glen. And must I go still desolate?
I might have found a comfort, had I had
Something to live for still; something to love;—
If she who robbed me of my child had given—

Her child instead ;—but all is over now !

She would not trust her father. All ! Farewell !

Amelia (starting up). Take him, whilst I have life
to bid thee ! Take him !

Nay, cling not to me, boy ! Take, take him.—Maurice ?

William. I will not leave you, mother.

Amelia. Hush ! hush ! hush !

My heart is breaking, William.—Maurice, speak !

Maurice. Dearest and best, be it as thou hast willed.

I owed thee a great sacrifice, Amelia ;—

And I shall still have thee !

Lord Glen. Thou giv'st him then ?

Maurice. I do. But for his own sake, good my lord,

Let not my son be taught to scorn the father

He never will forget ; and let his mother

See him sometimes, or she will surely die.

Amelia. I shall die now. My William !

Lord Glen. Emily !

Amelia. Ha !

Lord Glen. My sweet Emily !

Amelia.

We are forgiven !

Maurice, we are forgiven !

Lord Glen.

My own dear child,

My children, bless ye all ! Forgive this trial ;—

We'll never part again.



THE PAINTER'S DAUGHTER.

A DRAMATIC SCENE.

CHARACTERS.

COLANTONIO DEL FIORE.

ANGELO SOLARIO.

LAURA.

LISABETTA.

SCENE—*An Artist's Painting-Room—Flower-pieces
finished and unfinished on the walls and the easel—
a large picture covered with a veil in the front.*

THE PAINTER'S DAUGHTER.

COLANTONIO, *and* LISABETTA.

Colantonio. Good Lisabetta, know'st thou of my
daughter,
Madonna Laura ? I have sought in vain
Her chamber and her garden bower.

Lisabetta. She's still
At vespers, Signor.

Colantonio. Aye, I might have guess'd—
My fair and pensive nun ! She flies the light
And vain companionship of this gay city ;
Shunning alike woman her gossip, man
Her vassal ; coy, demure, retiring, shy,
Living in Naples here as if the world

Were all made up of the still garden where
My flowers grow, and this cool quiet room
Where my old hand, not yet deprived by age
Of its accustom'd skill, lends them new life
On canvas. But to seek the lonely church,
Where, closely veil'd, at vesper-hour she steals
To muse and pray, my gentle daughter ne'er
Forsakes her home.

Lisabetta. In truth, she is too sad.

But, good padronè, 'tis thy fault. A maid
So fair, so rich, should have been match'd long since
With some gay cavalier. That vow of thine,
That save a painter, a great painter, none
Should wed Madonna Laura, may perchance
Keep the Madonna Laura long a maid.
For of rare artists some are old, and some
Are wedded, and some love their single state
More than a fair young bride. 'Tis certain none
Hath wooed her to thy heart's content ;—and she—
Alas, poor child !—likes none of them.

Colantonio.

Sage nurse,

Dost love a secret ?

Lisabetta. Aye.*Colantonio.* A secret too

That thou may'st tell ?

Lisabetta. Canst thou doubt that ?*Colantonio.* Then listen !

Haste to the jewellers and merchants, furnish

A wardrobe for a princess ;—to the cooks,

Confectioners, and spice-men ; let us have

A banquet fit for kings ;—send round the city

To bid my friends and kindred ;—for the morrow

Is Laura's bridal.

Lisabetta. And her husband ?*Colantonio.* One

Whose name hath darted into fame, as the star

Of evening springs to light.

Lisabetta. Hast seen him ?*Colantonio.* No.

But I have seen the master-work by which

He wooes her ;—yonder curtain'd—hark ! She comes.
No word of this to her.

Enter LAURA.

My Laura !

Laura.

Take

My veil, good nurse ; the heat is stifling.

[Exit Lisabetta..

Father,

What would'st thou of me ? Julio says, that twice
Thou call'dst for Laura.

Colantonio.

I would say to thee—

Sit here by me, thy hand in mine :—this hand
So soft and warm, yet trembling as it knew
Its destiny, is claim'd, my Laura.

Laura.

Claim'd ?

Colantonio. Aye, by a lover, dearest.

Laura.

Lover !

Colantonio.

Say

A husband, sweet one, if it please thee better.

Laura. By whom ?

Colantonio. A painter who hath come from Rome
To seek thy love.

Laura. Love ! Do I know him ?

Colantonio. No.

Laura. Doth he know me ?

Colantonio. He says that he has seen
My beauteous daughter—here's his letter !—Surely
I think he loves thee.

Laura. Loves me ! If he did,
I love not him ! And wherefore must I wed ?
Art weary of me, father ?

Colantonio. Sweet one, no !

Laura. Am I a burthen in thy house ?

Colantonio. The joy !

The pride ! the sunshine !

Laura. Prythee, let me bide
In this dear home, and wear away my days
In ministering to thee. I have been
No thriftless housewife, Trust me, thou would'st miss

Thine own poor Laura, when some menial hand
Shook up thy pillow, when some menial tread
Broke rudely on thy slumbers—thou would'st miss
The soft light touch of love,—and at thy meals,
Thy solitary meals, and the sweet hour
Of morning meeting, and the tenderer time
That blends a blessing with good-night !—Oh father,
Why would'st thou send me from thee ?

Colantonio.

Didst thou think

I could part from thee ? Go to ! we are rich
In worldly pelf ; thy spouse shall dwell with us
Here in the home thou lov'st. Thou shalt not quit
Thy pretty garden bower, thy myrtle shade
For winter, or the summer walk, where grapes
Hang through the trellis arch amidst their rich
And clustering leaves. Thou shalt dwell here, as now,
In thine own pleasant home, thine old fond father
Blessing thee still at morn and eve. But wed,
Wed, my own Laura ! Thou art mine only child,
The child of mine old age, and I would fain

Live thy fair childhood o'er again, would see
Thy beauty multiplied, would taste that fondest
And tenderest ecstasy, a grandsire's love.
Besides, thou know'st my vow. Kings have ere now,
If chronicles say sooth, offer'd their heirs
The prize of valor, of brute strength ; I held thee
At higher price, my Laura, when I swore
None but a victor in the noble field
Of Art should win thee, save a painter none
Should call thee wife.

Laura.

Alas !

Colantonio.

And I have quell'd
The father's natural longing to extend
His race ; and, marvelling at thy coldness, joy'd
To see thee turn from the proud cavaliers
Of the gay city, with a gentle scorn
That waved away their wooings as the hand
Fans off the flies in summer time,—have joy'd
To see my virgin flower hang in the shade
From year to year, fresh, dewy, beautiful,

As when it burst the bud—

Laura.

Oh flatterer, fie!

Colantonio. . Nestling within its bower, so that no soil
Of the rude world came near it, scarcely kiss'd
By the hot breath of the sun. But now, my Laura,
(*uncovering the picture,*)

Look on that picture; needs no practised eye
To scan its beauty. Art sits triumphing
Like nature there, with daylight, life and youth.
Almost the vital breath hangs on those lips
Of parted coral; almost the warm blood
Glow in the modest cheek, and tender thought
Dwells in the fair broad forehead. 'Tis a young
Madonna. Look at the soft downcast eye,
The head bent downward! Look! Hast thou ne'er seen
Such features?

Laura (to herself). 'Tis myself! Younger and
fairer—

But such as love—And so my braided locks
I wore parted; so the silken hood,

Intensely blue, lay on my hair. Fool ! Fool !

The very puppet of a dream ! *He* was

A soldier, a brave soldier !

Colantonio.

He who painted

That picture loves thee, claims thee, the rich guerdon

Of excellence in art ; with noble pride

He wooes as Theseus erst Hippolyta,

Conquering his lovelier bride.

Laura.

Hast seen him ?

Colantonio. No.

Laura.

His name ?

Colantonio.

Zingaro.

Laura (to herself). Fool ! fool ! fool ! to think

Because a dream, or some strange trick of the sense,

Of memory, or fancy, some sweet sound

Passing along the air—I had been sitting

Within the bower he loved, entranced in thought,

Fond dreamy thought of him, through the hot noon,

And then I heard the nightingale afar

Or distant viol from the bay, and straight

Deem'd 'twas his fav'rite air—Fool ! fool ! His hand
Wielded the sword and shield, and deftly rein'd
The manèged steed ! Little he reck'd of brush
Or palette ;—then the time !—long, long ere now,
Hath he forgotten his poor Laura ! Man
Loves on till hope be dead, then love dies too ;
'Tis only woman lays her silly heart
In hope's cold urn, and in that fun'ral nest
Broods o'er her love.

Colantonio. Well ! hast thou gazed thy fill ?
It likes me, dearest, that with quivering lips,
And mutter'd words, and cheeks with passion pale,
Thou look'st on yonder picture. It hath thaw'd
Thy maiden coldness. I will send forthwith
To summon this Zingaro.

Laura. Father, stay !
Listen ! I am about to tell a tale
Too long unutter'd. Listen ! Thou hast talk'd
Of maiden coldness. I have loved, I love
With all the ardour that our burning sun

Strikes into woman's heart. Nay, start not, father,
Nor put me from thee thus ! I'll tell thee all.
Thou hast no cause to blush for me ; I loved
Deeply and fervidly, but chastely, father,
As ever priestess of old Rome adored
Her god Apollo.

Colantonio. Whom ?

Laura. Dost thou remember
Young Angelo Solario, the son
Of our rich neighbour ?

Colantonio. He ! Why he hath left
Naples these ten years !

Laura. And for ten long years
Dwelt in my heart.

Colantonio. Aye, I remember now.
The Count Solario once proposed to join
Our children's hands.

Laura. Oh good-old man !

Colantonio. It wrought in me
Some marvel that he would abase his son

To wed a painter's daughter.

Laura.

Kind old man!

Colantonio. But I had vow'd thee ev'n before thy
birth

To my great art ; its votary, if a boy ;

If a weak girl, its guerdon. Thus I said

To Count Solario: " Pluck from thy hot son

The sword he loves o'erwell, and bid him wield

The peaceful pencil ; then, if Heaven have given

The painter's eye, the painter's hand, and (rarest

And needfullest of all) that inward beam,

Genius, of painter and of poet bright

And glorious heritage!—Then when, matured

By time and patient toil, he shall achieve

Some master-work of art, then bid him come,

And he shall woo my daughter." The old man

Laugh'd ; and the gallant—I bethink me now

That Angelo was there—curl'd his proud lip,

And fix'd his flashing eye, and tightlier grasp'd

His jewell'd sword.

Laura. Spake he ?

Colantonio. No word. He went

Forth to the wars that very week ; and then

The father died ;—Why, Laura mine, thou wast

A girl when he departed !

Laura. Old enough

To love. The day he said, Farewell, I wrote

Sixteen in my short book of life. Ten years

This very day ! Oh old enough for love !

Colantonio. For fancy, flickering fancy ; such as
girls

Waste on a momentary toy, a flower,

A linnet, an embroider'd robe.

Laura. For love.

Woman's intense and passionate love. I've seen

Ten times the changing seasons wax and fade,

Have seen the spring-tide of my youth pass by

In absence, hopelessness, despair, and still

The thought within my heart, the voice that lived

Within mine ear, the image in mine eye,

Was Angelo. His loved idea hath been
My sole reality. All waking things,
The common pageants of this work-day world,
Pass'd by me as a dream, confused, unmark'd,
Forgotten ! Then I lived, then my soul woke,
When in the myrtle arbour, where erewhile
We spent our childish hours, I could sit
Alone up-coiled into myself, and muse
On him, till memory would conjure back
The very image of his sparkling youth
Before mine eyes ; the light elastic form
Whose every motion was a bound, whose walk
A gay curvet as springy as the pace
Of his own Barbary steed ; the face as dark
Even as a Moor's, but brightened by a smile
Vivid as noonday sunshine, eyes that flash'd
An insupportable light, and close black curls
Beneath the plumed cap,—I saw them all !
And in mine ear the very sound would dwell
Of that farewell which was a vow, that voice

Which in a tone of prophecy would cry,

" Laura, I'll wed thee yet!"

Colantonio.

This is a phrensy.

Laura. Oh, father, it is love !

Colantonio.

Laura, my sweet one,

The fault is mine. Thou hast been left o'erlong

Lonely and uncompanion'd, till vain dreams,

And thoughts vainer than dreams, have overborne

Thy better reason. Ten years, and thou hear'st

Nothing of Angelo ! or he is dead,

Or thou forgotten.

Laura.

Father, listen, father !

Last night—I should have said there was an air, . .

A rich, yet simple strain, whose burthen well

Became our summer seas, joyous or sad

As the deft singer in his varying mood

Hurried or stayed the measure, always sweet,

Most exquisitely sweet ! That air from boyhood

Angelo loved ; would carol as he walk'd

Along the streets ; sing whilst his plashing oar

Kept time ; and ever and anon a snatch
Of the familiar strain might travellers list,
Crossing the sharp sound of his horse's tread.
That strain by constant and peculiar use
Became his very own, belonged to him
As her sweet music to the nightingale,
Unmatched of any. From a little child
I knew those notes ; for so would Angelo
Summon his fairy playmate ;—'twas the lure
Of gamesome innocence, the call of love,
For ten years past unsounded,—till last night
Ling'ring in pensive musings in my bower,
I heard once more the strain.

Colantonio. . . . A dream ! a dream ! .

Laura. Sure as I live, the sound was there. 'Twas
not

The vision which at pleasure fancy calls
Or chases. I arose, I walked ; yet still
That air in its old sweetness, each division
Musical as a mermaid's song, was borne

Upon the breeze, though faintlier heard and faintlier
As I receded. It was Angelo,
Or of those noises of the air which oft
Wait round the living, when the parting soul
Of the beloved-one seeks its Heaven,—the knell
Which the Death-angel rings.

(Music without.)

Hark !

Colantonio.

I hear nothing.

(Music without and nearer.)

Aye now !

Laura. My Angelo, alive or dead,

I will be thine, thine only !

(Music again without.)

Hark again !

Colantonio. I shame to have hearkened to this tale.

My Laura,

I tell thee thou art vow'd and dedicate

To genius, to Zingaro.

(Angelo Solario enters behind, unperceived by either speaker.)

Laura. I will never
Wed other man than Angelo. Thy vow
Is sacrilegious, father, and unblest
As his, the judge of Israel, his, the king
Of men, whose sacrificial knife drank deep
The innocent blood in Aulis. I have wept
When I have heard the tale of Jephthah's daughter
Or poor Iphigenia : yet their lot,
Measured with mine was blessedness. They died.
But I should linger out a martyrdom
Of loveless life. There is no law of earth
Or Heaven that vests thee with a power to barter
Thy living child for yon vain shadow. Give
Thy ducats to Zingaro. Stay me not !
I'll to a nunnery—hold me not ! Unless
To list my vow that nor by force or fraud
Will I e'er wed—

Angelo (advancing). Oh fairest constancy!
Oh miracle of woman's faith;

Laura. 'Tis he!

His very self! This hand that presses mine,
These eyes that gaze on me——Just so he looked,
Just so he spake.—Oh surely I have dreamt
This ten years' absence! It was yesterday
We parted!

Angelo. Loveliest, most beloved, I come
To claim thee.

Colantonio. She is promised.

Angelo. To Zingaro?

Colantonio. Even so, good signor.

Laura. Never! Never!

Angelo. Sweetest,
Make no rash vows. If thou would crown my love,
Thou'lt wed Zingaro. Nay, snatch not away
This struggling hand!—the hand Zingaro won
For Angelo! Hast thou not read me yet?
Must I needs tell thee——

Laura.

Oh no, no, no, no!

Thou art he! Ye are one! And thou for me hast laid
Thy state aside, hast flung away thy sword,
Hast toil'd in silence and in secrecy,
For me! for me! Father, speak to him! Father,
Speak to him!

Colantonio. Calm thee, mine own Laura. Signor,

Thou hear'st her: says she sooth? Art thou indeed
The famed Zingaro? Is this master-work
Of painting thine?

Angelo.

Oh now I see that work,

That master-work of nature, whose rare beauty
I strove to copy, faint and feeble seems
My portraiture! Such as it is, the piece
Is mine.

Colantonio. My son!

Angelo.

My father!

Colantonio.

Wherefore change

Thy name? and why not say—

Angelo.

Sir! When I left

Thy presence, even when thou bad'st me wield
The peaceful pencil, and by toil and time
Climb the high steep of art, or ere I wooed
Thy daughter, even as thou spak'st, my soul
Was fix'd to its great purpose, and almost
Had I flung at thy feet my sword, and vow'd
To win the prize or die ; yet fear and shame
Master'd my speech, and I went forth resolved
And silent.

Colantonio. Whither didst thou go ?

Angelo. To Rome,

The shrine of art, on love's own pilgrimage.
My friends and kinsmen deem'd me at the camp ;
None save my father guess'd—and, when he died,
I was of all forgotten.

Laura. Not of all.

Angelo. Of all, save one the faithfullest. Mean-
time,

A nameless student, day and night I toil'd

For that dear faithful one. From my swart skin
My laughing comrades called me oft in jest
Zingaro *, till at last the name of scorn
Was crown'd by fame. Oh very dear to me
The name that won thee, Laura !

Colantonio. Will she wed
Zingaro ?

Laura. Will I !—Father, was my love
A frenzy ?

Colantonio. Sweet one, love and constancy
Have wrought this blessedness. Receive thy bride,
Thy twice-won bride, *Zingaro* !

* Gipsy.—The groundwork of the foregoing scene will be found in Mr. Mills' very interesting "Travels of Theodore Ducas." I have only taken the liberty to change the name of my hero from Antonio to Angelo. A similar anecdote has been related of several painters, especially of Quintin Matsys, the celebrated blacksmith of Antwerp—though I have for obvious reasons preferred the Italian version of the story. What could one do with a blacksmith and a Dutchman, and a man who painted misers counting their gold ?

Laura. He but gives
My hand. My heart is Angelo's.

Angelo. Mine! Mine!
Both mine!

FAIR ROSAMOND.

A DRAMATIC SCENE.

The following scene is chiefly taken from the popular ballad of the same name in Bishop Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*. Some anachronisms will, I fear, be found, besides those contained in the beautiful legend which forms the groundwork of my story ; but at an age so remote, and with a subject, to say the best of it, apocryphal, a strict adherence to the old tradition will hardly be demanded.

CHARACTERS.

HENRY THE SECOND, *King of England.*

QUEEN ELEANOR.

FAIR ROSAMOND.

CONSTANCE, }
MABEL, } *Rosamond's women.*

Archers, &c. attending on the King and Queen.

Scene, An Apartment in Rosamond's bower at Woodstock.

FAIR ROSAMOND.

Enter CONSTANCE meeting MABEL.

Constance. Alone, good Mabel? Hath not our fair
lady

Won homeward from the chase?

Mabel. But now I left her

In the great hall, prattling right merrily

To Pierce the white-haired forester, the old

And merry forester. Hark! thou may'st hear

Her sweet wild laughter now, echoing along

The gallery. Hark! hark! How like a gay

And reckless child! and how the old man's voice

Comes chuckling in between!

Constance.

What makes he here?

Mabel. He came to warn our lady to retire
Within her secret bower, and triply guard
The outer gate. He dreads a quick surprise
From powerful foes.

Constance. And Reginald Fitz-Urse,
The valiant captain of the guard, hath gone
This very morn to Warwick, to attend
His dying father. None remain save raw
And ignorant striplings. What hath scared old Pierce ?

Mabel. A clerk of Oxford passing through the chase
Brought tidings that last night a royal train
Reposed within the city, he believed
The Queen herself—but Lady Rosamond
Had yester-eve fond missives from the king
Whom she expects at noon ; and makes a mock
Of Pierce's warning, mimicking the dull
And purblind scholar who mistook her bright
And peerless Henry for the stiff and gaunt
And withered Eleanor ; dancing for glee,
Clapping her hands and laughing at each turn

Of her quick fancy, gentle as young lambs
Midst all her gambols, and more beautiful
Than blossoms of the field. 'Tis a light heart.

Constance. Think'st thou so ?

Mabel. Surely.

Constance. Hast thou dwelt with her
A two months' space, and deem'st her light of heart ?

Mabel. Full surely. Grant that sometimes she will
weep

The long day through, and watch the tedious night,
Yet soon the veriest trifle will relume
Her smile of joy.

Constance. Ay, for an hour, and then
To tears again. She bore a light heart, Mabel,
When I first knew her in her father's halls.
Oh what a peerless flower the spoiler's hand
Marred in the cropping !—poor, poor Rosamond !

Mabel. Sure she is happy when king Henry comes.

Constance. Ay then, for with idolatry so blind
She loves her royal lover, that each look,

Rosalmond. Dost thou believe
That legend, Constance? Hath thy woman's fear
So mastered thee that thou too dost mistake
King Henry's plumed helm for the starched coif
Of haughty Eleanor? And yet I thank thee,
Thy fears spring from thy love. Go take my purse
To good old Pierce; the faithful wretch is full
Of honest care. [Exit CONSTANCE.]

Now reach my broidery, Mabel,
The flowered scarf. Last night I dreamt of flowers,
What may that dream denote ?

Mabel. Good, surely madam.

Rosamond. Chiefly of roses.

Mabel. Certes, lady, good.

Rosamond. 'Twas looking on the scarf reminded me
Of that gay dream. Methought I was a spirit
In a bright world made up of sun and flowers,
A lonely spirit, and my task to deck
A vast triumphal temple, such as pilgrims
Tell of in far-off countries, to entwine
Rich garlands round its thousand fluted shafts
Of whitest alabaster. There I sate
Framing my wreaths profuse of various flowers—
For every flower was there of every hue
And of all seasons ;—there I sat and sang,
Bathed in the fragrance of light sunny showers,
And plied my joyful task ; or gladlier rose
And flitted on light pinions, round and round

The snowy columns twisting single wreaths,
Or richly interlacing, or from shaft
To shaft suspending the superb festoon
Like an inverted rainbow. There they hung
Unwithered, fresh, as on the parent bough,
Nourished by the sweet air ; and there I plied
My task unwearied—till the robin's song
Rang through the casement and awakened me :
Now what may that dream bode ?

Mabel.

Good, good, dear lady.

Rosamond. Say'st thou so, wench ? 'Tis a fair
augury.

Where hast thou laid the threads of gold ? Will that
Be like the Pensée ?—So the Normans call
The pretty blossom, but our English maids
Give it a dearer name, the sweet heart's-ease ;
This scarf is for king Henry. I must not
Forget the heart's-ease.—Constance loiters long.

Mabel. Shall I go call her ?

Rosamond.

No. When she returns

We'll ask her for some merry roundelay,
Some pleasant ditty of Provence; for Constance,
Staid and demure although she be, hath store
Of mirthful minstrelsy. I would beguile
The hour till Henry comes,—my princely Henry,
My king, my love.

Mabel. He comes to-day?

Rosamond. To-day,

At noon to-day—Oh how I love to speak
Over and over the glad words which tell
His coming, as if that blest time were made
By every repetition doubly sure.
He comes at noon—when yonder shadow cast
From the rich oriel window, even lies
Upon the floor, thou'lt hear the tramp of steeds
And clang of trumpets and the rapid tread
Of his light foot. At noon—not sooner, wench;
For he is punctual as beseemeth one
Whose will is clock to many, nor foreruns

The hour of meeting though 'tis me he meets.
At noon, when yonder sluggish shadow—surely
'Tis fixed in one eternal slope!—lies straight
Upon the floor. How blest shall I be then!—
Till then how slow and weary is the pause,
How long the last sad melancholy hour
Of expectation!

Mabel. 'Twill soon pass, dear lady!

Rosamond. Pass! Look how yonder shadow sleeps!

'T had past

More lightly in the woods midst falling leaves
And short quick flight of birds—But then I might
Have missed him, and so lost sweet precious minutes
Of his brief stay, or have encountered him
Midst the keen gazes of his knightly train,
And so have lost the o'erflowing gush of joy
At our first meeting. In this oriel chamber
He looks to find me still; I'll wait him here.
The shadow stirs not.

Mabel. If thou would'st but cease
To watch it, gentle lady, or could'st think
On any theme save one—

Rosamond. Could think on aught
Save him !—Oh thou hast never loved !—Could speak
Of aught save Henry, when each moment brings him
Nearer to these fond arms. If thou had'st loved
Thou would'st have known that I must talk of him
And of him only.

Mabel. Not of thy fair children ?

Rosamond. Not even of them. Yet would that they
were here

My pretty gentle Geoffrey, and that boy
Elder and bolder, my stout William,—he,
Who at some six years old already draws
His father's sword, already flashes forth
His father's spirit—my brave knightly boy !
Oh would that they were here, to shed fresh charms
On this blest meeting ! to make wholly perfect
Their mother's happiness !

Mabel. They dwell apart
By the King's orders ?

Rosamond. Ay, for their more safety.
The jealous Queen in her stern cruelty
Threatened to seize the innocent babes ; and he,
My Henry—Oh with what a tenderness
He won me to resign them ! My own Henry !
Lies not the shadow straighter ?

Mabel. Somewhat, madam,

Rosamond. 'Twill soon be even. Did I never tell
thee

The story of his wooing ? Listen, girl,
Sit here and listen. 'Twas a glorious day,
A glorious autumn day, as bright and clear
As this, the small white clouds now softly sailing
Along the deep blue sky, now fixed and still,
As the light western breeze, arose or sank
By fits—A glorious day ! I and my maids
Sat by the lakelet in my father's park
Working as we do now ; right merrily,

For young and innocent maids are in their nature
Gay as the larks above their heads. The scene
Was pleasant as the season ; not a spot
Of the Lord Clifford's wide demesne could vie
With this in beauty. Woods on every side
Ash, oak, and beech, sloped downward to the clear
And quiet waters, overhung by tufts
Of fern and hazel and long wreaths of briars,
Only one little turfy bank was free
From that rich underwood—there we sate bending
Over a tapestry loom, until we heard
A horn sound right above us, and espied
A hunter threading the rude path which wound
To our sequestered bower. Oh what a sight
It was ! the managed steed, white as the foam
Of some huge torrent, fiery, hot, and wild,
Yet reined into a tameness by his bold
And graceful rider, winning with slow steps
His way mid those huge trees ; now seen, now lost,

Now in bright sunshine, now in deepest shade ;
The red autumnal tints of those old woods
Contrasting well the huntsman's snow-white steed
And garb of Lincoln green. No sign bore he
Of prince or king, save in the sovran grace
Of his majestic port, his noble brow,
His keen commanding eye. My maidens fled
Soon as they saw the stranger.

Mabel.

And thou, lady ?

Rosamond. Why I too thought to fly, but loitered on
Collecting the bright silks and threads of gold,
Careful excuse that to myself I made
For lingering there, till he approached ; and then
When I in earnest turned to go, he stayed me
With such a smile and such a grace, and craved
My aid so piteously, for he had lost
Comrades and hounds and quarry and himself
In that morn's chase, that I was fain to proffer
Guidance to our old castle.

Mabel. He went with thee ?

Rosamond. No. At Lord Clifford's name he started:

—*Mabel,*

Shun thou the lover that shall start to hear
Thy father's name.—With slight excuse he rode
To seek his partners of the chase. But oft
From that day forth we met beside the lake ;—
And often when November storms came fast,
Driving against the casement, I have wept
Drop for drop with the sky, if my dear father
In his fond care forbade his Rosamond
To brave the raging tempest ; all my heart
Was in that bare damp wood and on the bank
Of that dark water, where my lover stood
To wait my coming, patiently as sits
The nightingale beside his brooding mate.
How could I chuse but love him ?

Mabel. Didst thou know

Thy lover for the king ?

Rosamond. Not till my love

Had been confessed ; then he in turn confessed
The fatal secret. What a coil of wild
And desperate passions woke within my heart
Fear, shame, and pride, and anger, but true love
O'ermastered all ; we fled, and I am here.

Mabel. Alas !

Rosamond. Nay, wherefore cry, Alas ?—My Father—
I must not think of him—Out on thee, wench !
That sigh of thine hath saddened me, hath brought
Fond thoughts of days of old—the blessed days
When I was innocent and happy ! Girl,
Thou hast a father, an old white-haired man
Who loves thee. Leave him not, I charge thee, Mabel !
Bring not those white hairs to the grave with shame
For thy foul sin !

Mabel. Oh weep not, dearest lady !
Look how the shadow hath crept on ! and surely
I hear a clamour at the gate— (*Noise without.*)

A tumult

Even in the Hall. Dost thou not hear ?

Rosamond.

'Tis he,

My king ! my Henry ! Quick, let's meet him !—No,
I must first dry my tears—Yet did I ever
Meet Henry without tears ?—Where loiters he ?

Mabel. And what may mean that cry ? The noise
comes near ;

Heaven grant that all be well !

Enter CONSTANCE.

Rosamond.

Hath aught befallen

The King ? Is Henry safe ? Speak ! Speak !

Constance.

Fly, Madam,

Fly to the secret chamber. Our brave knights
Are overpowered ; and we undone. The Queen
Approaches.

Enter QUEEN ELEANOR, Guards, &c.

Eleanor. Minion, she is here. Fly not,

Proud concubine.

Rosamond. I think not of it.

Eleanor.

Guard

Each entrance well that she escape not. Women,
Stand from about her. Whersfore kneel'st thou there ?

Rosamond. For mercy—Oh thy looks are terrible—
For mercy and for pardon.

Eleanor. Dar'st thou kneel
To me for pardon ? Dost thou know me ?

Rosamond. Yes ;
Thou art a Queen, a mighty Queen, but still
A woman !—Women should be pitiful,
Great Queens should pardon.

Eleanor. I am Henry's wife.
Dost ask for mercy now ? Aye sob, and shiver,
And dash thy face against the ground, and lie
Prostrate before me, minion. 'Tis my hour—

(*To one of her attendants.*)

Bring in the bowl, good Hubert !—I have been
A mockery of a Queen, whilst thou hast borne
The power, the state, the reverence ; enshrined
Within thy bower, like some vile Indian Idol,
Partner of Henry's heart, and more than partner

Of the fool people's love. The very courtiers
Grey-bearded counsellors, and valiant knights
And learned Bishops all have brought their suits
To Rosamond, fair Rosamond—I'll mar
That boasted beauty.—Bring the bowl, I say.—
Where be her sons ?

Rosamond (starting up). Oh Heaven is merciful !
They are not here ! They are safe ! Their innocent
lives

Are spared ! I thank thee, Lord, that in thy pity
Refused the mother's prayer. My boys are safe !

Eleanor. I'll reach them, harlot, yet.

Rosamond. Oh no, thou wilt not.

Thou art a mother ; thou hast boys as young
As mine, aye, and as fair. I saw one once,
A sweet and gracious child, he smiled upon me—

Eleanor. He knew thee not.

Rosamond. He smiled upon me, Queen,
And in my heart I blest him. 'Twas thy Geoffrey.
If e'er thou meet my children, think on him,

And thou'lt not harm them. Not to be in truth
King Henry's wife, could I have injured him.

Eleanor. Peace! smooth and wily serpent! I came
hither

Not to hold parley, but to execute
A needful justice on a desperate sinner.

Rosamond. We are all sinners.

Eleanor. Bring the cup. Drink that,
Or bare thy bosom to the sword.

Rosamond. 'Tis poison!

Eleanor. Swift sudden poison. Drink!

Rosamond. Not yet! Not yet!

The sternest justice yields some little pause
Betwixt the sentence and the death. Grant thou
Some respite for dear charity. An hour!

Only an hour!

Eleanor. Drink, minion.

Rosamond. I must die,
I knew that when I saw thee; but unshriven,
Without the rite of holy Church, or prayer

Of pious priest ! I ask thee not for life,
Albeit life is precious, I but crave
Such ghostly comfort as is given to thieves
And murderers on the scaffold.

Eleanor. Drain the bowl—

Or seize her, archers, and with your sharp swords
Let out her life.

Rosamond. Alas! for womanhood
Yield me not up to these stern men! I'll drink
The poison. Now farewell to hope, and joy,
And love the latest passion.

(She drinks the poison and a trumpet is heard without.)

Eleanor. Hark !, that trumpet !

Rosamond. I know the sound—The King! the
King! Too late
Thou com'st, my Henry.

Eleanor. Aye! The bowl is drained.
I am triumphant—Let King Henry come,
My great revenge is sure, and for my fate
I reck not.

(Enter KING HENRY, and Guards.)

Henry. Wherefore be the warders changed
And Reginald Fitz-Urse——Queen Eleanor !
I read the riddle now—but I am here
To guard thee, Rosamond, and clear thy bower
Of these stern visitants. Avoid the castle
All ye of the Queen's train ! Sir Hugh de Clinton,
See that my bidding be obeyed, and line
The courts with my stout yeomen.

[*Exeunt the Queen's guards.*]

So ! Fair Madam

I prythee back to Windsor ! I am loath
To use a husband's power—ay or a king's—
But tempt me not !—I know thee, Eleanor,
And so far can endure—no farther. Back
To Windsor, Queen ! Yon gentle trembler sits
Shivering like a new caged bird—Depart
I warn thee, Madam ! For as I'm a knight,
As I'm a man, I cannot chuse but soothe
The lovely wretch that suffers for my sin.

Wilt thou not bid me welcome, sweet? nor thank
The precious chance that brought me here to change
Hatred and malice into love and joy?

Rosamond. Joy!

Henry. Did she speak? Her gladsome voice
is changed;

And that sweet word rang like a knell! Take comfort,
My Rosamond.

Rosamond. Comfort! But 'tis a comfort
To see thee once again, once ere we part.

Henry. Who hath dared speak of parting? Who
could part

Two hearts that loved like ours? Who dare to sever
King Henry from his love?

Eleanor. A mightier king,
The mightiest of the mighty—Death. Yon bowl
Hath well avenged me.

Henry. Poisoned! Fiend accurst,
Full of all vice that woman ever knew,
Wanton in youth, and jealous in thine age,

And now a murderess, look to find a vengeance
Stupendous as thy crimes !

Rosamond.

Henry !

Henry.

My Rose,

My murdered Rose, how could I waste a thought
On aught save thee ! Go ransack all the land
For costly antidotes, search all the earth
For skilful leeches ! Say, I'll give my crown
To him that saves my Rosamond. My fairest,
Thou shalt not die.

Eleanor.

The crowns of the whole earth
Could not preserve her life an hour. The draught
Was deadly. Thou wilt see her boasted charms
A loathsome mass in thine embraces.

Henry.

Slay

Yon fiend ! She maddens me.

Rosamond.

Nay, touch her not.

Forgive me, 'tis the first time I e'er crost
A wish of thine——She must not die.

Henry.

Had she

A heart, those words would kill her.—Oh my Rose,
That I could die with thee !

Rosamond. No! thou must live
For England, for thy children. My poor boys !
Could I have seen them—send not, 'tis too late !
A little space, and thy poor Rosamond
Shall join her kindred clay. My boys! say to them
That with her parting breath their mother blessed——
Oh no! no! no! I have no right to bless
As virtuous mothers have. I am a curse
To all my kindred, even to them who drew
Their being from my crime. Let them forget
Their mother's very name; and breed them humbly—
Promise me that, my Henry.

Henry. Rosamond
They shall be bred as Princes.

Rosamond. Oh no! no!
Humbly, most humbly. I was ne'er ambitious
'Midst all my sins. I loved thee for thyself
Not for thy rank. 'Twas not the king I worshipped,

But Henry, mine own Henry ! Breed them humbly
And say to William (for his mounting spirit
Already fears me) that he take no vengeance
For this rash deed.

Henry. He shall not need. That task
Is mine.

Rosamond. That task is one forbid by Heaven.
I do conjure thee, Henry, by the love
Thou bear'st me, for the weal of thine own soul—

Eleanor. Go to, I fear him not.

Henry. I thought to slay her,
But that were mercy. She shall live.—Why leave
My circling arms, my Rosamond? Why drag
Thy trembling form toward yonder murderess?

Rosamond. *Madam !*
Nay, stay me not—'twill ease my heart. I am dying
Untimely midst my sins, unshriven, unblest,
By priest or bell, a sinner ! yet one duty
Even I may fill at this last hour, to part
In charity.

Eleanor. Dar'st thou to pardon me,
Harlot, adulteress ?

Rosamond. Queen, for that foul sin
I crave thy pardon ! Oh forgive me, Madam,
As I forgive——

Henry. She sinks ! Off with yon fiend,
To prison ! quick ! off with her !

(The guards take Eleanor away.)

My beloved,
How art thou ?

Rosamond. Easier.

Henry. Oh she'll live ! She'll live !
No ; no. Her cheeks grow whiter ; and her hands
Cold, cold ; and scarce my trembling arms sustain
Her sinking form.

Rosamond. I'm easier.

Henry. Is there aught
That I can do to pleasurè thee ? My sweet one,
Speak to me.

Rosamond. My poor children !

Henry. Are they not
My children, Rosamond? Those boys will be
My only comfort. I shall love them, dearest,
Too fondly.

Rosamond. And my father, my poor father!

Henry. He shall be mine.

Rosamond. I'm easier. Turn my face
Toward the south. The sunshine from the oriel
Lies straight upon the floor! 'Tis noon.—The hour
I longed for, and I've heard thy voice and felt
The pressure of thy lip, aye and been clasped
To that fond heart! We have been sinful, Henry,
And therefore are we doomed; have loved too well,
And therefore—Oh that this poor life of mine
May expiate our crimes! that thou may'st be
Happy and fortunate!

Henry. Pray for thyself,
Sweetest! What happiness is left for me
When thou art gone? Think but of thee.

Rosamond. I cannot

If sin it be to love, that sin cleaves to me—

Henry! my king! I'm faint.

Henry.

She falls! she dies!

Aye wet her temples with that essence.—Rosamond!

Is she gone, Constance? Is the spirit fled?

My eyes are dizzy. One kiss more! Her breath

Is gone; her lips are cold;—She's dead, quite dead;

And I am left alone and desolate.

My Rosamond, my love!



ALICE.

A DRAMATIC SCENE.

The scenery of this little drama is taken from the beautiful grounds of the Great House at Arborfield, near Reading. The characters and the story are entirely fictitious.

CHARACTERS.

MRS. NEVILLE.

HENRY.

ALICE.

ALICE.

SCENE.—*A path by the side of a river. Henry in the foreground ; Mrs. Neville and Alice under some trees at the side.*

Henry. This is the spot so loved, so long unseen !
The very spot ! the brimming Loddon here,
Winding through grassy fields, gives back the blue
And dappled sky so brightly, that it seems
Part of another Heaven. There is the mill,
Thwarting its course—the old and rustic mill,
With its white low-browed cot, and wooden bridge
That seems, yet is not, dangerous ; there the church
With its square tower ; and nearer that vast pile
Whose pointed roofs and porch and pinnacles
And carved and massive windows give a date

Prouder than the huge oaks which overtop
The clustered chimneys—cold and cheerless now !
No wreathing smoke bids welcome to the old
Ancestral hall, vacant and desolate,
But beautiful—how beautiful ! The shrubs
Grown into trees and blossoming profuse,
As in those flowery forests where they live
Seen but of Heaven.—Ah ! beneath the trees—
'Tis they ! It must be they ! That slender woman,
Bending her fair and patient cheek o'er work
Scarce whiter than her hands—the widow's cap—
The close grey gown—the undying loveliness—
It is herself ! And that young graceful girl,
Nor child nor woman, who in colourless
And sculptural beauty stands, severely pure,
Pale as a water-lily—that is Alice !
Her eyes—would I could see her eyes !—are sealed
On that unconscious book.—I'll speak to them.

(Advancing to Mrs. Neville and Alice).

Madam, I pray you pardon me !—This path,

So green and overgrown—doth this path lead
To Cleveland Hall ?

Mrs. Neville. It doth—alas ! it did.
The hall is silent now and tenantless ;
None treads the moss-grown road.

Henry. What, is there none
Within the inhospitable walls, to cheer
The poor man's heart ? Not one to ope the gate
To curious strangers, or the humbler wants
Of the sick way-worn traveller ? What, none ?
Not even a servant ?

Mrs. Neville. None. You lean your head
Against the trees, as sick or weary too.
Oh, rest you here awhile ! Find such a seat
As mine, midst these old roots ; and if you need
Refreshment—

Henry. Stir not, Madam ! my weak words
May ill express strong gratitude. To sit
Here is the perfectest repose ; amid
Such shade, such freshness, where the greenness falls

Like dew upon the burning eyes ; such smells
Swinging from the lime blossom, and the breath
Of flaunting woodbines ; and such coil of bees
Gathering their harvest. It is worth a life
Of that dull common joy which men-call bliss,
So to be weary, and to find such rest.

Mrs. Neville. You come from far ?

Henry. From Oxford here, to meet
The heir of yon fair hall.

Alice. Ah ! he knows *him* !

Henry (aside). Now those stars shine upon me !

Alice. You know *him* !

Mother, he knows Lord Claremont.

Mrs. Neville. Oh, the book

Is closed, which this long morning hath absorbed
Thy every sense—thou hast not seen thy young
And dear companions, when they wooed thee forth
To the gay hay-field ; hast not heard my voice—
Not though that voice called Alice.

Alice. Not heard thee !

Mother, not thee !—Oh fie upon thy charm,
Sweet poesy !—Not hear thy voice !

Henry. What lay
Hath such enchanting power?

(She gives him the book).

The Faërie Queen !

Oh gentle poet of the summer sky,
The fresh air, the green earth ! how suited thou
To this wild pastoral scene, and this young hand
Trembling with modesty !

Mrs. Neville. She'll hang all day
Over that tale of Una.

Henry. But this shower
Of snowy rose-leaves—sure it was her mark !—
Dropt from that tenderest page, where Britomart,
Pining for love, heartsick and desolate,
Is by her old nurse comforted and cheered,
And hushed to sleep like an o’erweary babe.
Euripides himself, in the famed scene
Of Phædra—no, nor Shakspeare, when he melts

The very soul with Juliet's tender woe—
Touched not more truly the witch-notes of love
Than that old simpleness.

Mrs. Neville. Yet Britomart—

Alice, it was a silly maid that loved
A picture.

Alice. Mother, no! Oh no! She loved
The high idea, the bright imagining
Of her own soul. Gentleness, valour, truth,
And lofty faith, and noble thought—'twas these
She loved; the magic image did but clothe,
But lend a form to the diviner mind
Which her pure fancy moulded.

Henry (aside). Now she stoops
To kiss her mother's hand!—Sweet artifice
Of maiden shame, to hide the crimson glow
Her ardent speech hath brought upon the cheek
That was all lily! (*aloud*) Go not! [*Exit ALICE.*

Mrs. Neville. She is gone
To join her youthful comrades.

Henry.

Ay, she moves

Towards them with a gentle dignity,
As yonder cygnet glides along the stream.
Look ! what a picture 'tis to see her pause
Under the brow of that lone summer-house
Which overhangs the water, overhung
With ivy and wild woodbine, backed with firs
So old and vast and shadowy, that they lend
A blackness to the deep rank grass ; and crowned
With poplars of such growth, such spiral height—
The stately columns of eternal Rome
Matched not the pair of living monuments
That shoot their tapering heads into the sky.
She pauses there, the beautiful !—amidst
That beauty, lifting her fair hand to shade
The light from those blue eyes—she passes now
Beneath the firs—she disappears. Yon scene—
Hath she not left a track of brightness there,
That living sunbeam ?—Yon fair scene is made
For happiness.—You sigh.

Mrs. Neville. Oh, once it was !

Once—but that beauty now strikes to my soul
A shivering chillness—Oh, it smiles upon me,
As the cold moon upon the colder grave.
Thou know'st Lord Claremont—that fair hall once owned
Another master. Hast thou never heard
The tale of shame and sorrow ?

Henry. I have heard,

Darkly, mysteriously, enough to wake
Deep pity. Would'st thou—Stranger as I am
I dare not ask—

Mrs. Neville. Stranger although thou be,
There is a pity in thy voice, thine eyes,
Thy smile, that looks like comfort : thou art born
To listen to sad stories. Didst thou ever
Hear of Sir Edward Mortimer ?

Henry. The grandsire
Of this young Lord ? the master of yon grand
And reverend pile ? Often.

Mrs. Neville. He was a man

Of that free spirit, which doth scatter bliss
As winds the summer blossom. In his eye
Dwelt mirth, and kindness in his speech, and love
In his warm heart—love of all human kind.
Something men spake of wildness in his youth ;
But when, after long travel, he brought home
A lovely lady and two cherub babes,
Seemed not a wiser or a better man.

Henry. And she ?

Mrs. Neville. She was a thing of life and light
And beauty. Such a vision as erst filled
The dreamy soul of Guido, when he drew
His bright Aurora. Such a brilliant flush
Of health, and joy, and youth—eternal youth !
Year after year rolled on, and stole no charm
No smile from that fair woman. Strangers saw her
Propped on her son's supporting arm, or throwing
Her white hand round her daughter's waist, and deemed
She was their younger sister. Oh, how proud
That noble son was of her peerless grace !

With what a sweet and tender flattery
He spake, and with what smiling blushes she
Would listen ! 'Twas a house of love. The daughter—

Henry. Was she not like thy Alice ?

Mrs. Neville. Ay, as like

As two white roses. Thou canst scarce have seen
The Lady Claremont ? Thou art all too young.

Henry. I've seen her portrait, where young purity
Is pictured to the life. She sits upon
A rock by the sea-shore, her starry eyes
Fixed on the gloomy sky, as if to wait
The raging of the storm.

Mrs. Neville. It came ! It came !

Poor Mary Mortimer ! almost a child,
Lord Claremont saw and loved her ; she loved him ;
And they were wedded. After a brief year
Of perfect bliss he died, and she returned
To the paternal home, with one fair boy,
To see her father die.

Henry. Alas ! alas !

Mrs. Neville. Sigh not for them that died—Sigh
not for them—

They were the happy. Years had passed away,
And grief was gone, another Edward ruled
Within the old hereditary hall—
Another kinder, dearer—all built up
Of dignity and honour. He had wooed
And wedded a young maiden, only rich
In love. The gentle countess and her boy
Dwelt with them, and his mother with her looks
Of beauty, her glad voice, her step of youth.
Oh, how the days flew then, when I—for I
Am that most wretched wife that was most blest !
Oh, how the days flew by, whilst Alice clung
Around my knee, half jealous when she saw
My William at my breast; or tottered round
Those giant trees ; or on the velvet lawn
Rolled in her joy, lisping her half-learnt words
To the dear cousin, whose sweet serious eyes
Pursued her every motion ! kind and frank,

And noble boy ! I seem to see him now,
With his bright face peeping among the boughs
Of yonder sweet briar, whilst my fairy girl
Sought her dear playmate, and the summer sun
Declining, streamed a glory round her form ;
And I stood watching them almost with tears—
So the deep gladness stirred me—when across
Her lovely childish voice, and the gay laugh
Of the hidden boy, came quick shrill piercing cries
Of sudden woe ; and rushing to the house,
I saw that beauteous mother on the floor,
Pale, speechless, prostrate, writhing ; whilst her son
With folded arms, and withering eyes, looked on ;
And her distracted daughter shrieked in gusts
Of helpless agony. Why shak'st thou thus ?

Henry. Man is not made of stone. Be brief. Even
now

I hear her screaming ! Oh, be brief !

Mrs. Neville.

The boy

Had followed me ; and trembling with the new

Strange sense of misery, seized my husband's hand,
And looked up in his face. Then, then he burst
From dreadful silence to more dreadful speech,
Cursing the mother at his feet, the child
Within his hand, the blessed light of day,
And life, and love! Darkly the tale of woe
Came from him. That fair, panting, crouching thing,
Quivering beneath her shame, she had confessed
Her frailty. Not till after Edward's birth
Did his dead father wed her—he had been
An innocent usurper. At one word
We lost our name, our wealth, our very home.
Delay had maddened him : before the sun
Was set, we and our children had passed forth
From this fair heritage, poor wanderers
Upon the earth. The gentle heiress staid,
Death-struck with the disgrace that seemed to stain
Even her white purity. In one short month
Her passing-bell had knolled.

Henry.

Poor—poor—But she.

The wretchedest, the mother ?

Mrs. Neville.

Ere she rose

From off the ground where she had plunged her shame,
Her brown hair turned to white. She died not : youth
And joy and beauty died ; but she lives on
In penitence.

Henry.

And he ?

Mrs. Neville.

Oh what a slow

And weary death is grief when it contends
With manhood's healthful prime ! We wandered on
Through many lands. He could not bear the sight
Or sound of aught familiar—his own name
Was as a dagger to him ; every smile
Of his unconscious son a deeper stab :
Only my gentle Alice——her he loved——
Her only ! till at last his heart grew strong
As his frame weakened, and he longed once more
To see the hall——'Twas speedy then——He lies
Under yon yew tree. I have never left——
I cannot leave——

Re-enter ALICE.

Alice. Mother!—Doth she not weep?—

Ah me! that tears should sadden such an hour!—

Mother! oh, smile upon me! I bring news

Of joy.—He comes to-day—this very day—

It is his birthday. I am come for flowers—

Doth not Lord Claremont love them?

Henry.

Yes: but most

The pure white rose.

Alice.

Look how it blossoms here

Amid the flaunting briar—the purest rose.

We shall soon fill the basket.

Mrs. Neville.

Claremont comes,

The heir, to take his state, to fill the hall

With revelry; and William—my poor boy!—

Thou art Lord Claremont's friend—canst thou forgive

A mother's tenderness?

Henry.

Madam, each word

Each patient tear of thine drew answering drops

From my sad heart. I knew, as Claremont knew,
Imperfectly, the story of his race.

Oh ! it has made the grief of his young life,
His splendid orphanage, to bear the weight
Of wealth which should be yours—to feel your woe,
To fear your hatred.

Alice. Hatred ! what, to him ?
The kindest, noblest, best ! Hatred to him !
And from my mother ! And 'tis thou his friend
That talk'st so ! Chide him mother. But thou know'st
not

Thou canst not know, how exquisitely one
Claremont and goodness are. We were so poor
Till Claremont succoured us ; a stripling then,
And under a stern guardian's tutelage,
He gave up every costly gaud of youth
For us. Nay, that were little. He sought out
Poor William in his distant school ; he wrote
To me with such a graciousness ; he sent
Gifts such as brothers to their sisters send—

Books, music, flowers : this pretty basket—see
How like a bee-hive the bright straw is wrought—
This basket came from him. And thou canst talk
Of hatred !

Henry. Happiest ! happiest !

Mrs. Neville. She is right ;

The passing pang is o'er : I cannot grieve
To see the noblest of a noble race
Even in my husband's seat.

Alice. Would he were here !

Mother, shall we not know him ? I remember,
Do I not mother, his dark curling hair,
And his mild serious eyes and rosy cheeks,
And how I used to love him !

Mrs. Neville. Wilt thou tell him

All this ?

Alice. Why should I not ? and yet sometimes
I have a fluttering at my heart—an awe—
A sinking.—Is it fear ?—'Twere wrong to fear
Such goodness : yet, in sooth, I tremble, mother ;

I know not why. If he were gentle——like——
If he would take my hand, and only say,
Alice !

Henry (taking her hand). My cousin Alice ! Fly
me not,

Alice !

Alice. Lord Claremont !

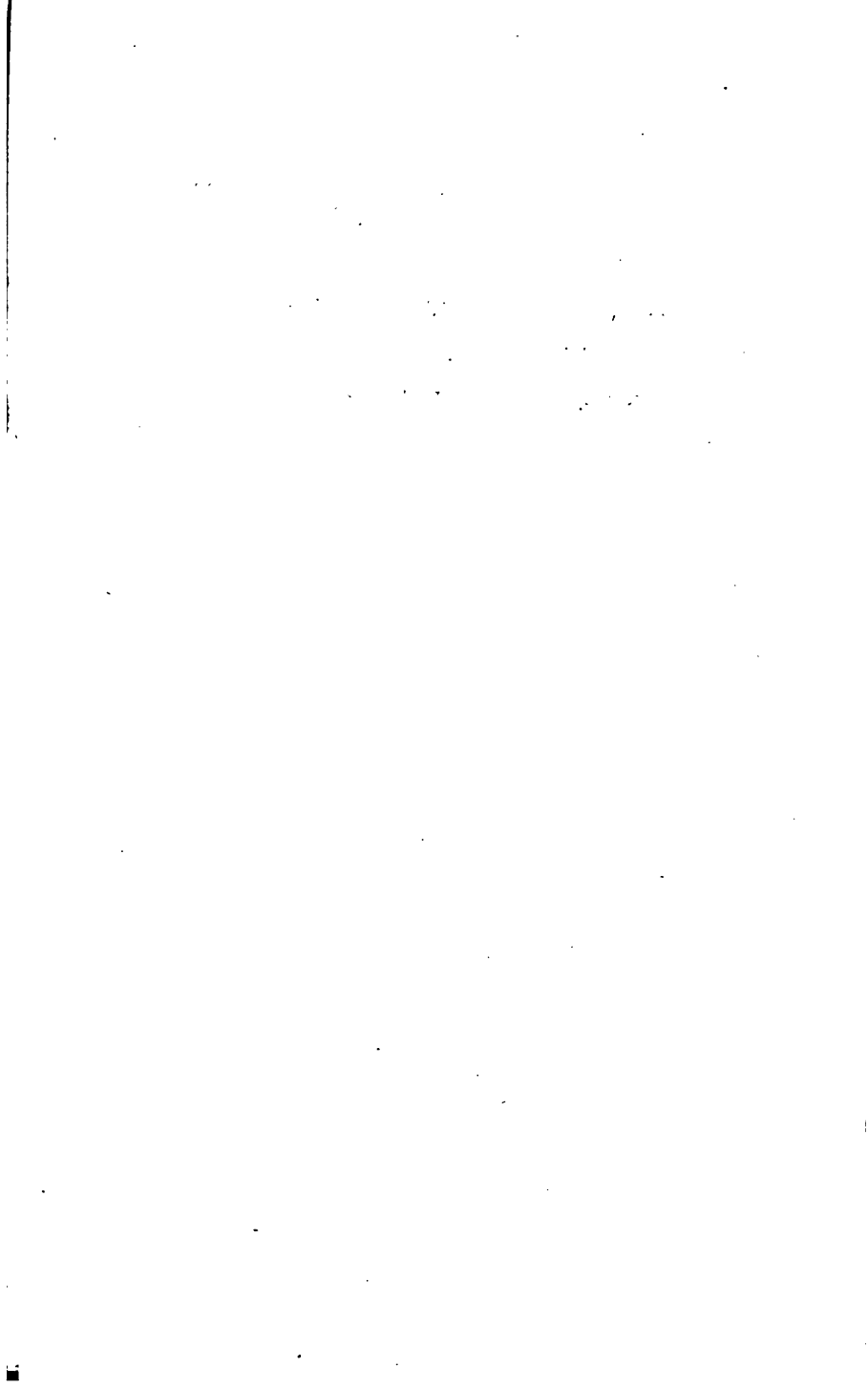
Henry. Nay, thy Henry, sweet one.

It was the first word that thou spakest, Alice ;
Do not forget it now.——Forgive me, Madam,
That I thus stole upon ye ! Oh, forgive
My deeper but unwilling guilt ! At length
I can be just. The old ancestral hall,
The wide demesne, are thine. Within an hour
Thy gentle William will be there to fill
His father's seat—the heir. Oh, thank me not :
I am still rich in my paternal wealth——
A beggar still in love. I have no mother——
Be thou one to me : let thy William call
Me brother.

Alice. And poor Alice ?

Henry. 'Tis through her
That I would claim that title.

Mrs. Neville. My dear son !



HENRY TALBOT.

A DRAMATIC SCENE.

They who are acquainted with the neighbourhood of Marlow, may perhaps recognise Seymour Court as the scene of this little drama. It is scarcely necessary to say that the characters and the story are altogether fictitious.

CHARACTERS.

HENRY TALBOT.

SIR FRANCIS MORDAUNT.

ELEANOR, *Talbot's Sister.*

LOUISA, *his Ward.*

SCENE, *An elegant Drawing-room, with windows to the ground, opening on a Terrace, ornamented with roses, &c.*

HENRY TALBOT.

ELEANOR and MORDAUNT *entering*.

Eleanor. Sir Francis Mordaunt, to a mournful house
I bid you welcome! But you bring us comfort—
His truest friend, his dearest! only you
Would he rejoice to see. When I first heard
Your late return from Italy, there rushed
Over my heart a gladness, a strange feeling,
That glowed like hope.

Mordaunt. This is a sad, sweet welcome.
He is no better, then?

Eleanor. Oh, no!

Mordaunt. And what
Is his disease?

Eleanor. A settled melancholy,
That doth consume his body; a decay
Even at the noble heart.

Mordaunt. The cause?

Eleanor. I know not.

Mordaunt. Oh, it must be some rooted malady
That works thus in him! Never can I join
Sadness and Henry Talbot. When we parted,
One little year ago, I gazed on him
As he stood on the sea beach, in all the pride
Of youth and manly beauty, his bright glance
Pursuing the swift vessel, and I thought,
If ever happiness find rest on earth,
She dwells in that fine form. High birth, high fortune,
High talent, high pursuit, the general praise,
The general love,—for his sweet graciousness
Commanded hearts,—and, better still than this,
Domestic bliss, affection, friendship, love,
And such a power to feel and give delight;
Such deep humanity, such a fine sense

Of beauty and of virtue! Set aside
His one infirmity of sudden anger,
As suddenly forgotten and redeemed
By instant penitence and generous shame,
And he might be the ideal of a man,
The standard all look up to.

Eleanor. Such he was :
You paint him to the life. How proud was I—
Too proud—of that dear brother ! You will find
A sadly altered man.

Mordaunt. He used to be
The very model of true cheerfulness ;
A gay and open spirit, which did feed
Upon its own pure thoughts. All mirth, all smiles !

Eleanor. He hath forgot to smile.

Mordaunt. Withal so kind—
So exquisitely kind !

Eleanor. That he is still ;
Kindness and he are so incorporate,
That death alone can part them. My dear brother !

Mordaunt. Such love as thine would once have
soothed all ills.

How long hath this change been.

Eleanor. Oh, many months!

Ever since that summer evening on the Thames—
That fatal August evening,—when their boat
Upset, and Lionel Grey, his foster-brother,
Was most unhappily drown'd. My brother, too,
Striving in vain to save him, almost lost
His life. He dived for the corse, and with the corse
Was brought out motionless. A fever follow'd—
A fever on the brain:—Oh the black horrors
Of that long dream! Those horrors passed away!
But a dark cloud remains.

Mordaunt. The consequence
Of a long fever. He must change the scene;
Must woo the sweet breath of the south; must go
To lovely Italy. I will return
With him, with you.

Eleanor. Nought can persuade him hence;

And surely—(it is terrible to say,
To think, to feel!)—too surely this disease
Is of the mind, the heart. Something doth weigh—
Thou art my brother's friend, and I to thee
Speak as a brother—something—oh, it breaks
My heart to think of it!

Mordaunt. I'd stake my life
That he is blameless.

Eleanor. Just so have I felt
A thousand times. But then he speaks wild words,
And my wild fear—oh, free me from that fear,
And I will worship thee! And comfort him,
I do beseech thee, comfort him, whate'er—
Do not desert him, even—I cannot speak :
But love him! Comfort him! Forsake him not!

Mordaunt. Never. But his best comforters must be
His sister—and one other. Dare I ask,
Was there not one still dearer, whose true love,
Whose faith, whose sympathy—I mean his ward,
The lovely orphan, his betrothed bride.

Eleanor. Poor, poor Louisa ! Yes, she still is here.
Poor, poor Louisa !

Mordaunt. Eighteen months have passed .
Since I last saw her. Never did I see
A maid so sweet, so fair, so delicate,
Or so devoted—living in his smiles,
As the butterfly in the sunbeam. And so young,
So made for peace and rest and happiness,
As if she were herself some airy creature,
Whom the first storm would shatter. Through this grief
What hath sustained her ?

Eleanor. The deceiver, hope.
She watches Henry's cheek, and if a flush
Of the bright treacherous hectic chance to cross it,
Then is she happy ; hangs upon his words ;
And if one flash burst from the clouded spirit—
One tone of the old love—poor, poor Louisa !
Would that she were afraid ! When it does come,
The stroke will kill her.

Mordaunt. Have you then no hope ?

Eleanor. Hark ! That's his step. Nay, do not rush
to meet him ;

He cannot bear surprise.—Hark to that step,
So slow, so feeble ! He is pausing now
For breath. Alas ! alas ! is not that step
The very knell of hope ?

Enter TALBOT.

Here is our friend,
Brother !

Mordaunt. Dear Talbot !

Talbot. Mordaunt, this is kind—
Too kind !

Eleanor. First let us place you on your couch ;
Then will we join to thank this kindest friend
For his kind visit. Henry, he is come
To nurse you, to usurp my office, Henry.

Mordaunt. Rather to share it with you. Dearest
Talbot,
You must be well.

Talbot. Oh this is kind, too kind !

I am not worthy, I was never worthy
Of such a friend. And now—oh go ! go ! go !

Fly me !

Mordaunt. And wherefore ?

Talbot. Why, to have thee stay
Would be a joy—and joy is not for me.
Forgive me, Mordaunt ; I am sick and wayward—
Sick at my soul—but it will soon be o'er.

Eleanor. I will not have thee talk so ; good my
brother,
This is no gentle welcome—

*(Advancing towards the window with Mordaunt,
and speaking to him apart.)*

For a while
Seem not to observe him. This strong passion then
Will pass away.

Mordaunt. Is't frequent ?

Eleanor. Yes. *(aloud)* Sir Francis,
Your coming is well timed. Do you remember,

When you last honor'd us, 'twas at the close
Of a most glorious autumn. Our beech woods
Own'd every tint of gold, from deepest red
To palest yellow. Often would you praise
Their woodland beauty, and as often I
With a proud boastful spirit bade you come
And gaze on them in May, and see the sunbeams
Wandering across them, with such wondrous charm
Of light and shadow, bringing into life
The unspeakable beauty of their fresh green tops.
This is the very height and prime of May :—
Said the proud boaster sooth ? Go to yon window—
Look on the distant woods.

Mordaunt.

To me this view

Is always lovely ; loveliest as it is,
Whate'er the season. This smooth sloping lawn,
Sprinkled with odorous shrubs, suddenly sinking
Into a steepness so abrupt ; the hills
Sweeping away so finely ; and between,
Deep in the bottom, the gay pretty town,

Mingled with trees and gardens ; the church spire
Lifting its white and taper head amidst ,
The woody heights that bound the various scene ;
And underneath those woods, round that fair town,
Between those hills, the ever-winding Thames—

Talbot. Ah !

Mordaunt. Glides, like a glittering snake,—

Talbot. Oh true ! true ! true !

Mordaunt. Coyly, by snatches, at rare intervals
Seen, but diffusing a perpetual sense
Of his bright presence—prince of streams !

Talbot. Oh fatal !

Mordaunt (to Eleanor). Alas ! is that the grief ?

Talbot. Oh fatal ! fatal !

Fatal as man's wild passions, as the worm
That never dies ! The mirror where black thoughts
And blacker deeds—What have I said ?

Eleanor. My Henry,
Art thou in pain ? Did'st call me ? Would'st thou aught ?
No, did'st thou say ? Well, I will leave thee, Henry !

(*Apart to Mordaunt.*) Approach him not :—alone he
will o'ermaster

The pang that shakes him. Make as though you heard
Nought that he says. Talk on.

Mordaunt. My heart is full.

Eleanor. And mine—Oh God ! But I have learnt
this sad

Hypocrisy, this necessary hardness.

See, he is calmer ! I beseech you, talk—

He listens—(*Aloud*). Then you grant that May is fair
Even as October in our prospect here ?

Mordaunt. The picture is as bright. And yet I miss
The autumnal beauty of this arching roof
Of trellis, richly hung with clustering vines,
Tendrils and leaves and fruit, a gorgeous frame
For the fair picture. Sweet it was to gaze—
And sweet it is. You look down on the world
From this calm seat, as from her lofty nest
The ring dove.

Talbot. Ay, it is an apt resemblance,

My own sweet sister bird.

Eleanor.

Nay, dearest brother,

My nest should be more lowly ; I would build
On the ground, and look still upward. There's a farm
Close by—oh we must show it you, Sir Francis—
Which is almost my envy. And it is
The prettiest walk ! Through a beech-wood the path,
A wild, rude copse-road, winds, beneath the light
And feathery stems of the young trees, so fresh
In their new delicate green, and so contrasting
With their slim, flexile forms, that almost seem
To bend as the wind passes, with the firm
Deep-rooted vigor of those older trees,
And nobler,—those grey giants of the woods,
That stir not at the tempest. Oh ! that path
Is pleasant, with its beds of richest moss,
And tufts of fairest flowers, fragrant woodroof
So silver white, wood-sorrel elegant,
Or light anemone. A pleasant path
Is that ; with such a sense of freshness round us,

Of cool and lovely light ; the very air
Has the hue of the young leaves. Downward the road
Winds till beneath a beech, whose slender stem
Seems toss'd across the path, all suddenly
The close wood ceases, and a steep descent
Leads to a valley, whose opposing side
Is crown'd with answering woods ; a narrow valley
Of richest meadow land, which creeps half up
The opposite hill ; and in the midst a farm,
With its old ample orchard, now one flush
Of fragrant bloom ; and just beneath the wood,
Close by the house, a rude deserted chalk-pit,
Half full of rank and creeping plants, with briars
And pendent roots of trees half covered o'er,
Like some wild shaggy ruin. Beautiful
To me is that lone farm. There is a peace,
A deep repose, a silent harmony
Of nature and of man. The circling woods
Shut out all human eyes ; and the gay orchard
Spreads its sweet world of blossoms, all unseen,

Save by the smiling sky. That were a spot
To live and die in.

Mordaunt. Beautiful it must be ;
But fancy makes the charms she tells, as the sunbeams,
Tenderly wandering o'er those distant woods,
Bring out their exquisite tints.

Eleanor. Nay, if you doubt—
Brother, the sun and air to-day are join'd
In a rare compact ; 'tis the warmth of June,
With April's balmy breath. Come forth, dear Henry !
We'll put my poney in the garden-chair,
And soon convert this unbeliever. Come !
It will revive you. Let us lead him thither.
You will enjoy this air.

Talbot. I am not worthy
To breathe it, Eleanor. That innocent joy
Belongs to the innocent.

Eleanor. Nay, you must come.
I'll call Louisa, and prepare the chaise.
You will not fail us, Henry ? [Exit ELEANOR.



Mordaunt.

Beautiful

Is sisterly love ; divinely beautiful
In yonder noble maid. How firm, how gentle,
How like the purity of some old marble
Is she in form and mind ! Even her young beauty,
The very language of her lofty brow,
Is queen-like, till she bends to speak to thee,
With such affectionate softness, and a look
So touchingly sweet. Alas ! I have no sister.
How blest ye are together !

Talbot.

Blest we were ;

But now—the word is mockery ; yet we were
Once blest. You know that we were twins and orphans
Alone in the wide world, and all the world
To one another. I so proud of her !
And she so fond of me !

Mordaunt.

You still so proud ;

She still so fond.

Talbot.

Ay ; but the joy is gone,

Once we were call'd alike : look on me now,

And look on her. A red and withering hand
Hath past over my youth, and turn'd my blood
To fire. Her care, her grief, her misery,

Am I. 'Twill soon be past.

Mordaunt. Nay, you must live
For that twin sister's sake ; to pay her care ;
To bless her love.

Talbot. I have no right to love ;
I am infected. That which was my bliss
Is now my punishment. I have no right
To kindness, hers or yours ; or that of one
Whose deeper tenderness doth pierce my heart
As with a dagger. One so patiently,
So exquisitely true ; so trusting, yet
So fearful ; all made up of the fond hope
That trembling sits and smiles. What agony
To look upon that smile, and watch that hope,
And know how false, how hollow ! I've deserved
Even that bitterest drop.

Mordaunt. This is, indeed,

A sickness of the soul. Henry, we two
Have been, from boy to youth, from youth to man,
Friends ; not of such as borrow friendship's name
To gild the flimsy band that knits gay striplings
In light companionship, or the politic league
Of subtle selfish man ; but friends of the old
Heroic cast, such as forbear, and bear,
And serve, and love, and die, and trust their lives
To the proved faith of friendship.

Talbot.

Such we were,

And if a spirit so fallen—

Mordaunt.

Such we are ;

And being such, I do conjure thee, Henry,
By that old friendship, by the gushing tears
Which fill'd our eyes at meeting, by the love
Which even now is working in our breasts,
Confide in me. Disclose the fatal secret
Which weighs upon your soul.

Talbot.

What ! cast the shade

Of guilt on thy white honour ? Tell to thee,

To thee that deadly——Never ! never ! never !
Here let it die !—Here ! here ! Even though it swell
My heart to bursting.

Mordaunt. Henry, you are ill ;
And your sick fancy in the wayward mood,
Turns error into crime. A purer mind,
A nobler heart, and, set aside the rare
And momentary flash of sudden wrath,
A kinder temper——

Talbot. Momentary ! Ay,
So is the thunderbolt.

Mordaunt. I do implore,
Even as I would sue for present life,
Brood not upon this tale. Or tell it me,
Or chase it from thy memory.

Talbot. Listen, then,
Since thou wilt share the load,—since thou wilt wrest
The murderer's story, listen !

Mordaunt. Murderer !

Talbot. Why, I have said it. Didst thou think that I

Was dying for some trivial larceny—

Some poor man's common crime ? Sir, thou shalt find

I am a braver villain !

Mordaunt. Talk not thus.

I pray you, talk not thus. Be calm ! Be calm !

Talbot. And he would still a breaking heart with
words,

As Canute talk'd—He weeps ! Forgive me, friend !

Truest and best, and dearest, pardon me !

For I am near bestraught with misery,

And know not what I say. Forgive me, Mordaunt,

And listen. Didst thou e'er——First reach that water,

And sit down here by me ; for I must speak

Names that will shake my very soul, and then

The voice may falter. Interrupt me not ;

For I have now a passing hour of strength,

A gleam of parting light, and I would fain

Pour into thy kind bosom my remorse,

My agony. So ! Did you ever see

Lionel Grey ?

Mordaunt. Never.

Talbot. Nor his dear mother,
The widow Grey ?

Mordaunt. Your nurse ? That kindest woman !
Often.

Talbot. She was, indeed, the kindest woman,
The simplest, gentlest, sweetest-spirited woman
That ever trod the earth ;—my foster-mother,
Who look'd around on all her little world
With the indulgent softness that she felt
For the infant at her breast ; for me, whom most
She loved ; for me, who most loved her ; my refuge
In every childish grief, the joyful sharer
Of every childish joy ! Oh how I loved
That dear and smiling face, made beautiful
By the warm heart, and the soft pleasant voice
That never spake but true and gentle words !
That never—She is dead ! And I—nay, fear not—
This pang will pass away. She had a son,
An only child ;—the milk which nourish'd me

Was stolen from him.—Poor Lionel ! so soon
Did I——He was a lovely youth ; most richly
Deck'd with all lighter graces, music, painting,
And poesy ; and, as he grew to manhood,
His talent grew finer and stronger. Proud
Was his dear mother of his pretty songs,
When Ellen Talbot sang them.

Mordaunt.

I have heard her.

A queen might have been proud had such lips sung
The lays of her king-son.

Talbot.

Poor Lionel

Was with us long and often. In our house
And in our hearts he held a brother's place,
Till he at length forgot the unequal rank
Which we would not remember. Rash and vain,
And most presumptuous in his love !—Alas !
And dare I blame him ?—I !—My sister saw
His passion for Louisa, and she strove
To check his hopes ; but I saw nought, till all
Fatally—fatally——It was a day

Of sultry August, Lionel and I
At sunset sought the river, and embarked
Alone upon the waters. Oh how calm,
How beautiful they were ! How made for peace !
The golden clouds shone into them, and there
The soft and bright blue sky, fringed in by trees.
My soul was lapp'd in the calm loveliness,
The balmy silence. When, all suddenly,
Lionel, heated as I think by wine,
Demanded my Louisa's hand. Louisa !
Mine own affianced bride ! I told him this
Calmly and soothingly ; and he replied
That I might force her hand, but that her heart
Was his. Then the strong frenzy mastered me,
And with the oar I dashed him overboard,
Stunn'd, stupefied ! I too stood motionless,
Stunn'd, stupefied, till I saw the drowning wretch
Rise on the waters. Then the sense returned ;
The fear, the hope, the breathless agony,
The desperate struggle. How I toiled to save

Whom I had murdered ! How I rowed and swam,
And dived, and all but died ! We were drawn out
Together ; he a breathless corse, and I
A wretch that could not die, doomed to live on,
With the new, aching, gnawing consciousness
Of deadly crime here at my heart—here ! here !
Now, am I not a murderer ?

Mordaunt.

Surely, no.

It was a frenzied impulse ; an unhappy,
But unintended homicide. Thy will
Was innocent of the deed.

Talbot.

Oft have I tried

To think so ; but I recollect too well
I had a murderer's feelings when I raised——
Seek not to palliate.

Mordaunt.

Yet be comforted.

Whate'er the crime, surely the penalty
May expiate ; thy bitter sufferings,
Thy deep and true repentance !

Talbot.

Oh, if tears

Could wash out blood, no day hath passed but I
Have thus embalmed his memory ! Grievously
Have I been punished ; here, in my heart's core ;
In undeserved respect ; in praise ; in love ;
In poor Louisa ; in my noble sister ;
In all the tears I cause. All lovely things
Combine to punish me ; the golden evening,
The sunny waters, and the calm blue sky,
They are my scourges ! Oh the agony
That I have felt at kindness ! Most at hers,
The mother's. After that most wretched night,
My mind and body sank, alike subdued,
For many weeks. A merciful pause it was
Of misery ! I woke again to suffer,
And the first person by my couch was she
In her deep mourning habit ; her pale face
Covered with tears, yet trying for a smile ;
And that voice, once so pleasant, low and hoarse,
Yet striving still, in sweet and gentle words,
To speak of love, and care, and gratitude

To me—Great God! to me!—for all I dared
To save her son! She thanked me, and she blessed me!
She blessed me! Never curse struck to the soul
Like that kind woman's blessing!

Mordaunt.

And she died ?

Talbot. She died. For many weeks I watched her
bed.

And then I closed her eyes, and followed her,
And saw her laid by him ! That was my death-stroke.
Then, when the earth fell cold on both my victims,
My doom was sealed.

Mordaunt.

Oh say not so, dear Henry !

Live for us all. For poor Louisa, live !—
For thy own Eleanor !—for me !

Talbot.

My heart

Is lighter. When I die, if Eleanor
Should grieve, as well I think she will; oh ! tell her
My story ; she will then be comforted
That I am in my grave. Poor, poor Louisa !
When the oak falls, the ivy dies with it ;

And she——But I am better, lighter, easier
In body and in soul. There is no balm
So healing as a good man's pity.

Mordaunt.

Say

His love, his deep respect. Thou hast well practised
The painfulest and noblest of all virtues——
Repentance. Comfort thee ! Look forward, onward :
Think in thy being how much happiness
Is lapt.

Talbot. Oh, my true friend ! Hark ! She comes here !
I know her tread afar,—her nymph-like tread,
So light and quick. The graceful greyhound scarce
Can match her graceful speed.

Enter ELEANOR and LOUISA.

Louisa.

Sir Francis, welcome !

This is indeed a happiness.—How well
He looks ! How much revived !

Eleanor.

His face is flushed ;

But that——

Louisa. Look at his eye ! and see ! see ! see !
He smiles again ! Oh blessings on his head
Whose coming caused that smile !

Mordaunt. Why such a blessing
Might draw a man from Afric.

Louisa. I could chide him
That he did not come sooner, the dear friend,
Bringer of health and comfort.

Talbot. My Louisa,
I do begin to hope.

Louisa. Oh blessed sound !

Talbot. When shall we forth into the woods, fair
Ellen ?

Eleanor. First, dearest brother, rest awhile. The sun
Is overcast. Wait till the clouds disperse.

Rest thee. Ay, so. Now, shall I read to thee ?

Talbot. No. All this day, an old and favourite
strain

Hath echoed in mine ear. Wilt thou not sing it
For me, Louisa ?

Louisa. Yes! oh yes!

Eleanor. But listening

To her sweet voice is not repose.

Mordaunt. What then?

Eleanor. Pleasure, exciting, searching, rapturous
pleasure!

Yet sing to him, Louisa! See how pale,

How shivering—Henry, thou art ill again?

Talbot. No; 'twill pass off. Dearest and kindest
sister,

Believe, 'twill pass away. Now sing.

Louisa. What song?

Talbot. That which is ringing in mine ears. The
strain,

Which, by the old tradition of our house,

Was wont to usher in the nuptial morn

Of all the Talbots—which I used to call

Our bridal song, Louisa. I would fain

Hear that song once again.

Louisa. Not that! not that!

Eleanor. Yes. 'Tis a pleasant and a ringing air,
And suits thee well ; thy springy form, thy voice,
Young, lively, clear, thy blushing smile. Thou seem'st
At once the quaint musician, the light nymph,
Strewer of flowers, and the fair bride. Sing ! Sing !
Let's hear that pleasant strain.—Still paler !—Sing !

Louisa sings.

Forth the lovely bride ye bring :
Gayest flowers before her fling,
From your high-piled baskets spread,
Maidens of the fairy tread !
Strew them far, and wide, and high
A rosy shower 'twixt earth and sky !
Strew about ! Strew about * !
Bright jonquil, in golden pride,
Fair carnation, freak'd and dyed,
Strew about ! Strew about !

* For the burthen of this song " Strew about ! Strew about !" I am indebted to a song in Thomas Campion's " Memorable Masque."

Dark-eyed pinks, with fringes light,
Rich geraniums, clustering bright,

Strew about ! Strew about !

Flaunting pea, and harebell blue,
And damask-rose of deepest hue,
And purest lilies, maidens, strew !

Strew about ! Strew about !

Home the lovely bride ye bring :
Choicest flowers before her fling,
Till dizzying steams of rich perfume
Fill the lofty banquet-room !

Strew the tender citron there,
The crushed magnolia proud and rare,

Strew about ! Strew about !

Orange blossoms, newly dropp'd,
Chains from high acacia cropp'd,

Strew about ! Strew about !

Pale musk-rose, so light and fine,
Cloves, and stars of jessamine,

Strew about ! Strew about !

Tops of myrtle, wet with dew,
Nipp'd where the leaflets sprout anew,
Fragrant bay-leaves, maidens, strew !
Strew about !——

Eleanor. Oh help ! he faints ! Help ! help ! His
breath is gone.

Mordaunt. Alas ! alas ! he ne'er——I cannot find
A pulse——alas ! he's dead !

Louisa. Dead ! dare not say it !
'Tis but a swoon. He's better. He'll be well.
Did he not say so,—he whose voice was truth ?
And dost thou dare—Oh rouse thee, my own Henry,
And I will sing to thee——

Eleanor. Oh hush ! hush ! hush !

Louisa. Will sing to thee the song thou lov'st so well.

(*Sings*) Pale musk-rose so light and fine,
Cloves, and stars of jessamine——

Eleanor. Cease ! cease ! Oh this is horrible ! Weep !
Weep !

Weep for thy Henry ! He is gone ! the kindest,
The tenderest, the best !—Her brain is wandering.

Louisa (sings). Home the lovely bride ye bring—
I cannot sing. I have no breath. I tremble
At my own voice. And he—he listens not.
Henry ! He hears me not. He's dead ! he's dead !
Eleanor, he is dead !

Eleanor. She, too, will die ;
That other dearest thing ! And I alone,
And desolate—

Mordaunt. No Ellen, not alone !

Eleanor. Oh tell me, thou his friend, what load of
grief—

Mordaunt. He died a penitent.

Eleanor. For that, thank Heaven !
All else may be endured. My kindest brother !
My tenderest ! my best ! Farewell ! Farewell !

THE SIEGE.

A DRAMATIC SCENE.

CHARACTERS.

BIANCA, *Duchess of Mantua.*

CLAUDIA, *her young maid of honour.*

COUNT D'OSMA, *her general.*

COUNTESS D'OSMA, *his wife.*

ORLANDO, *an officer.*

MELZI, *a chamberlain.*

ANTONIO, *a dumb page.*

SCENE, *The palace at Mantua.*

THE SIEGE.

DUCHESS, CLAUDIA, MELZI.

Duchess. Now my good chamberlain, I prythee send
And tell the governor at six this evening
We will attend the council. Hark ye, Sir!
Keep the door close. Let no one enter here,
Soldier or statesman. 'Tis a day of truce;
For once the weary echoes sleep in peace
Unroused by the loud cannonry; I too
Would fain for once be quiet. *[Exit MELZI.]*

Claudia mine,

Sit down and talk to me, and comfort me,
My little faithful girl.

Claudia. Ah ! dearest lady !

I would I were a man to fight for thee,
And kill this terrible cousin !

Duchess. Out upon thee !

Thou kill a man, my pretty ladybird,
My blossom of fourteen ! I did not think
That thou hadst been so fond of fighting, Claudia ;
I've seen thee quake and shiver and turn pale—
Ay, as myself—at many a bloody sight
And warlike sound this siege has forced upon us.

Claudia. But if I were a man—and even now,
Poor coward as she is, for her dear mistress
Would Claudia die.

Duchess. That were no kindly service
To thy poor loving mistress ! Rather wish
That thou and I, remote from all this coil,
Two cottage maidens, on some pleasant hill
Dwelt peacefully. Claudia, should'st thou not like
To sit at evening, working in the porch,
Watching the sunset, whilst the vine-wreathed elms

Were richly gilded by his upward beams ;
And thou would'st tell a hundred merry tales,
And I should sing sweet snatches of old songs,
The songs thou lov'st so well.

Claudia. Oh ! we should be
As blithe as two young birds !

Duchess. Such joy may come ;—
But there will be much tumult and unrest
Before that blessed hour. Ah ! woe is me
That ever I was born a princess, Claudia !

Claudia. That ever the ambitious prince Lorenzo
Was born to claim your rightful crown !

Duchess. To win !
Nay start not, Claudia ; I have not a hope
Remaining. Here we are, shut up in Mantua,—
Mantua, which nought can save but speedy succour ;—
And where to look for aid !—All my allies
Weak, wavering, treacherous, to my fortunate cousin
Inclining, as the sunflower to the sun ;
My valiant general wounded and a prisoner :

And she, his wife, whose prompt and active spirit
Was well worth my whole council-board, she too
A voluntary captive.

Claudia. The dear countess!

How much we miss her quick and cheerful look,
Her frank and pleasant speech! Yet she was right
To tend her husband's couch;—was she not right?

Duchess. Oh! yes.

Claudia. And she will soon be back. I dreamt
Last night that she was here, and the lord cardinal
Your wisest uncle, and another lord,
—But not a cardinal,—so noble-looking,
So lovely, yet so grand—and he and you—
I must not tell your highness what I dreamt,
But I will wager that the cardinal
Will speedily be here.

Duchess. Now Heaven forefend!
That wise lord cardinal, as thou call'st him, girl,
He is my grief of griefs. I have a letter
Of that wise lord's inditing.

Enter MELZI.

How now, Sir!

Did we not say we would be private?

Melzi.

Madam,

The Countess D'Osma.

[*Exit.*

Enter COUNTESS D'OSMA and ORLANDO.

Duchess.

Laura! my own Laura!

Thou comest at a wish. Claudia and I

Were talking of thee.

Claudia.

Nay, I dreamt of her—

Countess. And be it for good or evil, Claudia's
dreams

Do still come true—say'st thou not so, my sweet one?

How the dear child clings to me! Let me pay

My love and duty here;—my royal mistress!

My dearest friend!

Duchess.

I ask not for my general;

To see thee here and smiling, is to know

That he is better.

Countess. Better ; but still weak.

Duchess. And may we hope to see him ? Will they
hear

Of ransom ? Claudia here would pawn her jewels,
And so would I, even to my very crown,
Could we so purchase that bold faithful friend,
Whose presence was protection.

Claudia. That we would.

Shall I go fetch them ?

Countess. My sweet simpleton,
There is no need. I have not words to thank you,—
But the fair duchess will regain her servant,
Claudia her merry friend, without the loss
Of one the smallest of those seedling pearls
That fringe the royal mantle. He will soon
Be here. This young and valiant gentleman,
To whom he hath been an honor'd prisoner,
I a most cherish'd and most grateful guest,
Will tell you on what terms.

Duchess. He brings with him

A welcome in your praises. Gentle Sir,
What are these terms? Your prince can scarcely ask
That which we should refuse. What must we give
For our great captain's freedom?

Orlando.

Gracious Madam,

I am commanded to deliver him
Without exchange or ransom. He is now
With a small escort at the city gate ;
He would remain there—a most needless form—
Till I returned ;—a vain and needless form,
But one, which well becomes the stainless honor
Of that bright ornament of chivalry
Count D'Osmá.

Duchess. Without ransom or exchange?

Orlando. Without exchange or ransom—free as air.
The prince Lorenzo would not for those worlds
Which roll unnumbered in the midnight heaven,
By staking it 'gainst one of smaller note,
Degrade your general's old and noble name ;
But he being free, I have a grace to crave

Of your free bounty. You have here, fair duchess,
A prisoner, whom my master fain would ransom
With aught that he——

Duchess. Talk not of ransom, Sir !
Take him. I am too happy to repay
Some slender part of this amazing debt
Of courtesy and kindness to your prince.
I knew not we had any prisoner
Of note enough for ransom. Yesternight
Some soldiers were brought in ; and a young boy
Dumb as they thought——

Orlando. Deaf from his birth and mute.
That is the boy,—Lorenzo's favourite page.

Duchess. His page ! That poor mute boy Lorenzo's
page,
The bold and fortunate soldier, who, men say,
Is rough as winds in March ! What can he do
With such a helpless innocent ?

Orlando. As the winds
Of March do with the violet, lap it round,

And nurse it, with a rude protecting love,
Into a stronger beauty, and a more
Exceeding sweetness. Prince Lorenzo found,
Five years ago, this young and tender boy
Hanging, all drowned in dumb and innocent tears,
Over his dying mother, who implored
Protection for her child, with such a fond
And passionate earnestness, as might have moved
A heart of stone. He promised, and as yet
Hath kept his promise. This is the first time
Antonio and his master have been parted.
Right glad will either be to see the other ;
Right grateful to the fair and royal dame
To whom they owe such joy.

Duchess.

My Claudia, send

To summon the mute page.—What is he like ?

[*Exit CLAUDIA.*

Orlando. A lovely boy—fair, slender, delicate,
Almost as that young maid ; with curling hair
Of such a brown as is the unsunned side

Of the ripe hazel nut ; a ready smile
Instinct with meaning ; a quick varying blush,
Which is his prettier speech ; a large blue eye
Tenderly watching those whom best he loves,
And giving back their looks, as the clear lake
Reflects its shores.

Duchess. To thee, too, he was dear ?

Orlando. Oh ! very dear. So innocent, so helpless,
So made for love and pity ! He was a sort
Of living gentleness, and gentle thoughts
Came with his presence. In the rough rude camp
That peaceful spirit seemed a type of peace,
As a small bit, no bigger than my hand,
Of the exquisite blue sky, looks out and smiles
From the dark stormy Heaven. For this we loved
him.

Duchess. For this you loved him,—that I well
believe ;

But surely, Sir, the bold ambitious soldier,
His warlike master, loved him not for this ?

Orlando. I cannot read men's hearts ; but surely,
Madam,

I think he did.

Duchess. Can he love any thing ?

Orlando. He must be made of stubborn stuff indeed,
That did not give some kindness to that kind
Affectionate boy. The most unloving heart
That ever froze within a coat of mail
Must have loved him. His pretty flattery,
Unlike all other flatteries ; his apt
And constant service ; and the stronger tie
Of his entire dependence ; his so fond
And firm reliance—speak, fair Countess D'Oasma,
Did not Lorenzo love him ?

Countess. I am sure
He loved him, Sir ; as fondly as yourself.

Enter CLAUDIA.

Duchess. Well, Claudia ?

Claudia. They have sent to seek him, Madam

Duchess. How came he taken ?

Orlando. He's a painter born,

And, as we guess, caught by some lovelier scene,
Some bright effect of sunshine or of shade,
Ventured too near the walls. He is absorbed
In his delightful art ; beauty to him
Is as a real goddess. Poor Antonio !
How richly will his short captivity
Be paid when he shall see——Did you not say
You had no picture ? that she had refused ?
Dear countess, I will beg for you the next
Hebe or Flora that Antonio paints,
And that will be her portrait.

Countess. Fail me not.

Orlando. Have I your highness' leave to seek the gates,
And bring Count D'Oasma hither ? I fear for him
This long exposure to the noon-day sun.
He will be better here. May I not say
'Tis your command ? He must obey me then.

Duchess. It is my wish. By that time young Antonio

Will be prepared to meet you. I would offer
An hostage for your safety, but I see
You doubt us not ;—the generous and the brave,
They know not what doubt means.—One of my chamber,
Attend this gentleman !—You will return
In half an hour ?

Orlando. In a less space, fair duchess,
I trust to bring my captive to your feet.

Countess. Now is your wager won ?

Orlando. Lost. . I have lost
Two hearts. [*Exit.*

Claudia. Oh what a gallant gentleman !
How noble and how stately, yet how gentle !
What a fine frankness, mix'd with deep respect
And winning courtesy ! What piercing eyes—
Such sudden laughter in them when he glanced
Up at the countess ! What a gracious smile !
And then his voice—so sweet, so very kind,
As if he loved all that he talked about ;—
Oh he's the very creature of my dream !

Countess. Thy dream again ! What was it, mistress
mine ?

Was he to wed thee ?

Claudia. Me ! Oh no ! Wed me !

No, no : not me. Cannot you guess ? Wed me !

Duchess. Peace, dearest prattler ! Tell me, my own
Laura,

The story of thy absence : tell me all,
All that befell thee in that hostile camp.

But first——What is he called ?

Countess. Who call'd ?

Duchess. The youth

That left us even now. Is he of rank ?

Countess. High born, not wealthy ; of the younger
branch

Of an illustrious house ; a gallant soldier,
High in your cousin's councils and the love
Of his brave army, is our kind Orlando.

Claudia. Orlando ! What a pretty knightly name !

Duchess. Claudia, be still. Now, countess, for thy tale.

Countess. 'Tis summ'd up in two words. In yonder
camp,

Our hatred and our fear, nothing I found
But noble kindness ; I have brought away
Nothing but gratitude. He is so great,
So good !

Duchess. Orlando ?

Countess. Ay, and Prince Lorenzo.
You know what fear possess'd me when I sought
My husband, dead or living ; in that fear,
Growing upon me even to senselessness,
I reach'd the camp, and fainted. I revived
To hear a well-known voice call upon Laura,
His own dear Laura, and I found myself
Supported on a kind and manly breast,
Beside my husband's couch.

Duchess. Orlando's ?

Countess. Yes.

We were his prisoners,—no—his honor'd guests,
For so he loved to call us ; and as guests

Beloved and honor'd we have dwelt with him
Even till this hour. Never was sympathy
So touching and so true. He shared my watch
Throughout the weary night, as soothingly
As mothers tend a sickly babe ! he cheer'd
The painful day with reading and with converse,
And hopeful happy smiles. He and Antonio,
The sweet mute page, they were to me, Bianca,
Another dear Bianca and her Claudia.
Can I say more ? Is not this gentleness
Rare in a soldier ? Then the peaceful tastes
That dwelt so strangely in that warlike tent,
Flute and guitar, and books in many tongues,
And drawings above all, free, masterly,
Even as his dear Antonio's. Not a map
Or soldier's plan but on some vacant edge
Betray'd the artist's hand.

Claudia.

Oh what a man !

Countess. Has my sweet duchess then no news for
me ?

Has she not letters from the cardinal ?

Duchess. Such as I blush to show thee. He would
have me—

Me born a princess !—He would have me, Laura,

Me trained by thee in whitest modesty

And delicate reserve !—He would have me

Cast off all maiden pride, all womanly shame,

And seek, invite, and win, if win I may,

This young Lorenzo. I would sooner die.

Countess. I would not have thee seek him, my
Bianca,

And yet——

Duchess. Yet what ?

Countess. I wish thou wast his wife.

Duchess. His wife ! That fierce rough man my
enemy—

His wife !

Countess. Thou art mistaken in him, dearest !—

Mantua must fall.

Duchess. Why I can live unduchess'd.

Claudia and I were planning out to-day

A happy cottage life—

Countess. Pooh ! pooh !

Duchess. Or thou

May'st give us shelter.

Countess. Never doubt of that.

Duchess. Yet it might injure thee with the new
duke

(How strange that title sounds !) to harbour me.

No ! a pale nun within some lowly cell, -

I may defy life's changes. Thou wilt go

With me, my Claudia ? Oh, I still must have

Something to love !—the strong necessity

Of woman's heart. Thou wilt go with me, dearest ?

Claudia. Ay, to the end of the world. But my own
duchess

Will never be a nun. A happier fate

Is hers. She will find some one better worth

Her love than poor, poor Claudia—will she not ?

A different love !

Duchess. My little faithful girl,
We'll to a nunnery. *Countess*—I know not
Why I should ask the question—What was that
Signor Orlando gave thee as ye parted ?

Countess. A trifling toy.

Duchess. Did I not hear him say—
I scarce could catch the words—What was the toy ?

Countess. A heart-shaped brooch of ruby, set with
pearls.

See, here.

Claudia. The pretty trinket ! And he gave thee
This for a keep-sake ?

Countess. No. I won it of him
In a fair wager.

Claudia. About what ? Do tell !

Countess. We two were talking gravely yesternight
Of beauty of complexion. He preferred
Corregio's bright-haired angels, fair as light,
Soft as a summer cloud. I love, you know,
The lovely brown ; and much I talked of eyes

Shining through long dark lashes ; clustering curls
As dark as they, adorning and contrasting
The ivory forehead ; much of dimpled cheeks
Coloured like damask roses, and of lips
Like parted coral ; till at last I wagered
That ere another sunset he should own
Himself my convert. He has lost his stake,
As ye perceive.

Duchess. And Claudia's glossy hair
Is pale as undyed silk !

Claudia. He's here again.

Enter COUNT D'OSMA, supported by ORLANDO and
MELZI.

Duchess. My gallant general, my faithful friend,
Welcome !—How weak you are ! Lie on this couch.
Yes, Claudia, that is right—shake up the cushions.
So ! so ! Lie down.

Count D'Osma. My sweet and gentle mistress,
This graciousness——

Duchess. Hush ! hush ! Go to him, Laura.
My Claudia, thy caresses overpower him.
How pale he is ! how faint !—And I the cause
Of all this misery !—Melzi, come to me.

Claudia. Alas ! how much he suffers ! Think you, Sir,
He will be well again ?

Orlando. Oh, doubt it not !
This painful languor springs from loss of blood ;
From this his first exertion ; most of all
From the deep joy to be again at home,
To meet his royal mistress, and to feel
Her touching tenderness.

Melzi. The crown and keys ?

Duchess. Yes—yes. [Exit Melzi.]

Signor Orlando, we expect
The mute page instantly.

Orlando. I can but bless
His absence, gracious lady.

Duchess. Once again
Accept my thanks. Countess, I see we still

Must want our general; he is too weak
To venture forth to battle.

Count d'Osma. Strong enough
To fight for you, die for you. But, alas!
The sacrifice were vain. There is no hope.
The strength of yonder army, and the skill
Of its brave leader, and the gathering numbers
Of bold allies that flock on every side;—
And we so few!——

Orlando. I ought not to hear this.

Duchess. Yes, most of all you ought. Signo

Orlando,

You are a generous enemy,—a friend;—
I cannot call him less to whom I owe
Count d'Osma—and as friend or enemy
Hear me! I will no longer sacrifice
My faithful subjects in this wasting war.
My cousin, howsoe'er we have been trained
To hate each other, is a gallant prince,
Wise, valiant, fortunate, and fitter far

To reign in Mantua than I, a woman,
A timorous, friendless, most defenceless woman !

Re-enter Melzi, with the crown, which he gives to the

Duchess, and goes out.

Bear thou to prince Lorenzo, to the Duke
Of Mantua, this crown, the honoured crown
Of our brave ancestors ; no braver man
E'er wreathed his hard-won laurels with the gems
That star its golden circlet. With it bear
The city keys. Conjure him to forgive
My bold defenders ; their fidelity
To me is the best pledge of loyalty
To their new master. Oh be they forgiven !
For me, I only ask to pass unharmed
As far as Naples.—Grieve not, my good Lord ;
Claudia and I shall be as happy there
As two young linnets freshly let abroad
From a fine gilded cage.—Nay, take the crown.

Orlando. Duchess !—

Duchess. I am no duchess. To that title

I'll never answer more. Signor Orlando,
I am Bianca di Gonzaga now ;
I prythee call me so ;—and take this crown.

Orlando. Not yet ; not yet. Fair Countess, hast
thou said

Lorenzo's message ?

Countess. No. My own Bianca,
Thou hast done rightly, wisely ; but this prince,
This duke—no matter how, or when, or where—
Hath seen and loves thee, and will little prize
Thy crown without thyself.

Duchess. It cannot be.

Countess. 'Tis so.

Duchess. And if it were, could I love him
So long my foe, and now and evermore
A rude blunt soldier ? I am no Hippolita,
To be conquered into love.

Countess. Thou know'st him not.
Truly thou said'st that ye have both been trained
In hatred. He thought thee, my trembling fawn,

A youthful Amazon ;—he's wiser now ;—
And thou, when thou shalt know him, wilt confess
Thou too hast been mistaken. D'Osma, say,
Is not the prince most amiable ?

Count d'Osma. A hero.—

Duchess. Why there it is ! I hate the very sound—
A hero ! A mere fighter ! whose one virtue
Is o'ertopped by the lion. Pardon me,
My valiant friends ; I do beseech you, pardon !
You may, for heroes though ye be, you still
Are something more. It chafes my very soul
To hear all manly qualities comprized
In that brute instinct, courage. If I wed,
It shall be one who joins to a bold spirit
A kind and tender heart ; one who can love
All gentle things, books, music, nature, art ;
One who——But I shall never wed ! I pray you,
Good signor, take the crown. Where is this page ?
Countess. All that thou hast described is prince
Lorenzo ;—

Will not his friend plead for him ?

Orlando.

On my knees

I do entreat his fair obdurate cousin

To hear him plead himself. Admit him once !

Duchess. Thou too !—My Claudia, we will to a
nunnery ;—

Thou wilt go with me ?

Claudia.

To the death. How strange

And sad this is ! my dream was different.

Enter Melzi and Antonio.

Melzi. Madam, the page.

Duchess.

We'll to a nunnery.

Claudia. Look there, look there, dear duchess ! see
he kneels

Low at his master's feet !

Duchess.

We'll to a nunnery.

Claudia. Nay, but look at him ; he's so beautiful ;—
He's risen now. And look ! look ! look ! dear duchess !
The poor rejected crown,—look, he has placed it

Upon Orlando's head. How it becomes him !—

How like a prince he looks !—Like ! 'Tis the prince !

The prince himself !

Countess. Dear ardent girl, it is.

Orlando. Canst thou forgive me, cousin ? loveliest
cousin,

And most beloved !—Say, canst thou pardon me ?

There is thy crown, Bianca ! Thou art still

The Duchess ! None but thou shall reign in Mantua.

The sceptre is a bauble ; my ambition

Soars higher ; I would call the hand that sways it

My own, my very own. Speak, most beloved !

My lovely cousin, speak !

Duchess. Is all this real ?

Art thou Lorenzo ? And dost thou indeed——?

Do not deceive me.

Orlando. Never, sweet, again,

So help me love !

Claudia. Now is not Claudia's dream

The very truth ? You'll see the cardinal

Will come to bless their union. Look ! the page,
The lovely page, how earnestly he gazes
On our more lovely duchess !—Look ! he joins
Their hands ;—and now he kneels to kiss those hands
United ; and she blushes, and he smiles.
Heaven bless them both ! So ends our weary siege.

THE BRIDAL EVE.

A DRAMATIC SCENE.

CHARACTERS.

LORD FITZ-ALWYN.

HUBERT.

HELEN.

ISABEL.

MARGARET.

SCENE, *A Lady's Apartment in a Baronial Castle.*

THE BRIDAL EVE.

HELEN, ISABEL, MARGARET.

Isabel. This is the bridal eve, and yet thy lady—
Look how she sits on yonder couch, her head
Bent like a snowdrop, her white clasped hands
Listlessly hanging on her knee, as though
No pulse beat in them. All the livelong day
She hath not moved. Why Helen! Helen Clifford!
What, not a word to thy poor Isabel—
Thy cousin Isabel? not one kind word
When we shall part to-morrow?—not one word?
Can this be the dear maid whom once I knew
The merriest heart of merry Cumberland,
Carolling her blithe songs from morn to eve

As gaily as the gladsome birds that flew

Around her summer bower ?

Margaret.

Didst thou ne'er see

A caged linnet ?

Isabel.

Oh ! how pale she is,

How changed, since o'er those northern hills she swept

On her white Barbary steed, swift as the wind

That waved her glossy tresses, crisp and curled

Like the vine's tendrils, o'er that dimpled cheek

Of roses, and those eyes of smiling light,

And that clear brow ! All in her huntress green

She might have seemed the youngest fairest nymph

Of crescented Diana, such a glow

Of beauty was about her.

Margaret.

Hast thou ne'er

Seen a transplanted flower—seen how it droops

And fades and dies ? Your southern gardens ill

Suit the wild heath-bell. She hath never known

Sorrow till now. Now, lady, she hath lost

Her home, her father.

Isabel. Is not my home hers?
And my kind father?

Margaret. Ay, but she must leave
Even this adopted home, and wed——

Isabel. The pride
Of English chivalry! her long betrothed——
And oh, so worthy; bravest in the field,
Gayest at revel, kindest every where,
Is Lord Fitz-Alwyn.

Margaret. Grant that it be so,
Unless she loved him——

Isabel. She must love him.

Margaret. Look!
The very casket, that last night he laid
At Helen's feet, still at her feet it lies,
Neglected, overthrown. The oaken floor
Is bright with jewelry, stringed amethysts,
Rubies and sapphires, linked with massy gold——

Helen. Chains! chains! all chains!

Isabel. Nay, sweetest coz, see here

This diadem of orient pearl—how well
Thy raven curls become it! how it sits
Amid the ringlets, with a queenly pride
A maiden modesty! Oh fling it not
Aside!

Helen. Give me the wild wood coronal
Of living pearls, fresh from the fragrant thorn
And diamonded with dew! Dost thou remember,
Margaret, the garland of the Queen of May,
When poor—What's that?

Isabel. 'Tis but the distant sound
Of music at the banquet. They feast high.

Helen. Hark! hark! This comes not from the hall.
'Tis here
Beneath the casement. Margaret, hark! a harp!
A northern harp!

Margaret. Beshrew these narrow bars!
I cannot see the minstrel.

Helen. Hush! he sings.

SONG (*without*).

High o'er the baron's castle tall
Rich banners float, with heavy fall,
And light and song, in mingling tide,
Pour forth to hail the lovely bride.
Yet, lady, still the birchen tree
Waves o'er the cottage on the lea ;
The babbling stream runs bright and fair,—
The love-star of the west shines there.

Isabel. How breathlessly she listens ! See, she flings
Backward her ringleted and glossy hair,
Lest a loose curl might intercept the sound
Of that sweet music. Margaret, hast thou heard
The strain before ?

Margaret. The air, but not the words.

SONG (*without*).

Mail'd warders pace o'er keep and tower,
Gay maidens deck the lady's bower ;

Page, Squire, and knight, a princely train,
Wait duteous at her bridle rein.
Yet in that cot the milk-white hound,
The favourite falcon still are found ;
And one more fond, more true than they,
Born to adore and to obey.

Isabel. 'Tis a strange bridal song ; but it hath waked
The statue into life. Look, how the blood
Mounts in her cheek !

Margaret. Hush ! it begins again.

SONG (*without*).

The coronet of jewels rare
Shines proudly o'er her face so fair ;
And titles high, and higher name
Fitz-Alwyn's lovely bride may claim.
And yet the wreath of hawthorn bough
Once lightlier press'd that snowy brow ;
And hearts that wither now were gay
When she was but the Queen of May.

Isabel. 'Tis over now. That was the final close.
Why, Helen, wherefore dost thou wave thy hand
From the barr'd casement? Wherefore turn away
With thy fine form so raised, so firm a step,
So high a brow, and eyes that in their light
Bear such command?

Helen. Margaret, tell Lord Fitz-Alwyn
That I entreat his presence.

Margaret. Dearest lady——

Helen. Question me not, but go.

[*Exit MARGARET.*

So! will Fitz-Alwyn,

Think'st thou, obey the call?

Isabel. Doubt not of that,
Thou hast been coyer than the fresh-caged bird,
To which poor Margaret likened thee; he scarce
Hath seen thee, Helen—scarce hath heard thy voice.

Re-enter MARGARET with LORD FITZ-ALWYN.

What, here already? Come upon a wish!

Fitz-Alwyn. I was not far to seek. Hast thou ne'er
heard

How wakeful misers haunt the secret spot.
Where their heart lies, their gold? Even so lurked I
Around my treasure, waiting but to hear
A distant footfall, or a clapping door,
Or pleasant rustling of a silken robe,
Or aught that told of her. What would fair Helen
Of her true knight?

Isabel. Sit down beside us here——
She best can speak her will.

Helen. I would but ask him
To listen to a simple tale of one
More simple, a poor northern maid. 'Tis short;
'Twill not detain thee long.

Fitz-Alwyn. Oh make it long,
That I may listen! Could'st thou know the joy
To sit and hear thee! Oh prolong the tale!
Speak but till I be weary!

Isabel. Now, dear Helen!

Helen. There dwelt a knight among the Cumbrian hills
With one young daughter—an old wealthy knight,
Who had no joy but in the chase, small joy
Even in the chase without her. So she grew
The hardest mountain-nymph that ever braved
The summer sun, the winter wind. Poor child!
She had no mother, none to teach the craft
Of female mysteries—the lute, the loom,
The needle—they she knew not. All her lore
Was of the beauty of the earth and sky,
The green hills and the bosky vales, the clear
And gushing waters, and the shifting forms
Of clouds. All her companions were the dear
Mute partners of her sports—how speaking they
Amidst their speechlessness! Her Barbary steed
With his bright arching neck, curved up to meet
Her fondling hand; her greyhound, playfullest
Of happy creatures, of a richer white,
Like marble touched by the sun, leaping and bounding
If he but heard her voice; her falcon, proud

To sit upon her wrist. She loved them all.—

I dally with my tale and weary thee.

Fitz-Alwyn. Speak on. Thy voice hath in it such
a charm

As the clear warblings of the bird of song,
The nightingale. Her varied notes we hear
All in themselves unlike, yet most unlike
All other melody, till every gush
Of liquid sound seems to our ravished souls
Too brief. Speak on.

Isabel. Had she no comrade?

Helen. One—

Her own dear father—and—

Fitz-Alwyn. Speak on.

Helen. Hard by

Dwelt a lone widow, poor, but gently born,
And she too had one child.

Fitz-Alwyn. A daughter?

Helen. No.

He was some two years older than the maid,

And loved like her the chase, or rather loved
Nature and beauty—the green wood, the show
Of hound and huntsman 'midst the forest glades,
The bright and moving picture. For the chase
He was too gentle. I have seen—'twas said
He had been seen to weep when the poor stag,
Panting and quivering, already dead
Almost with fear and toil, hath fallen. Yet still
He loved the Barbary steed, the milk-white hound,
The bright-eyed falcon. Ever at their side
Was Hubert Knowles.

Fitz-Alwyn. And the young maid? Loved she
One of so soft a mould?

Helen. From earliest youth,
From earliest childhood, they were playmates, friends.
All that she knew of book or song was learnt
Of Hubert in that low-roofed cot, where dwelt
His smiling mother. There, beneath the shade
Of the light fragrant birch and to the sound
Of running waters, they—I speak of them,

The mountain maid and the fond mother—oft
Would sit for hours, listening his minstrel lay
And marking how the poet's fire lit up
That mild blue eye, and kindled that pale cheek
Embrowned with a sweet sunniness, and raised
The veins on his white brow, and seemed to swell
His slender form into a nobleness
Of beauty ; till, at length, with head flung back,
And chest dilating, the forgotten harp
Dropt silent from his hands, and song was lost
In the wild crowd of images that pressed
On his awakened fancy.

Fitz-Alwyn. Did the maid

Wed the young minstrel ?

Helen. No : she was betrothed.

Fitz-Alwyn. Alas ! I thought so ;—was betrothed
to one

Unworthy ?

Helen. Oh, no, no ; to one too good,
Too great, too noble !

Fitz-Alwyn. One whom she loved not ?

Helen. One whom she knew not, therefore loved
not. Love

Is born of love.

Fitz-Alwyn. And Hubert ?

Helen. He spake not ;

No, not a word ! She had broad lands, and he
Was poor—

Fitz-Alwyn. Why dost thou pause ?

Helen. Scarcely she knew,

Till they were parted, what her own heart meant
When it so throbbed.

Fitz-Alwyn. Prythee say on.

Helen. Oh, look not

So searchingly upon me ! Her dear father
Died, and her noble wooer from the wars
Came crowned with honour ; and her guardian sought
The lonely orphan in her northern hall,
And brought her to his castle.

Fitz-Alwyn. Well !

Helen.

She met

Him, her betrothed ; and she would fain have told—

But fear, and awe, and maiden shame, and doubt

If Hubert loved, for never till—

Margaret.

Hark ! Hark !

Again the sweet harp of the north.

SONG (*without*).

Bless thee ! I may no longer stay,

No longer bid thee think on me ;

I cannot 'bide thy bridal day—

But, Helen, I go blessing thee.

Bless thee ! no vow of thine is broke ;

I asked not thy dear love for me,

Though tears and sighs and blushes spoke—

Yet, Helen, I go blessing thee.

Bless thee ! yet do not quite forget—

Oh, sometimes, sometimes pity me !

My sun of life is early set—

But, Helen, I die blessing thee !

Helen. Alas ! alas ! Dost hear him ?

Fitz-Alwyn.

Margaret, seek

This harper ; bring him hither. We must check

His boldness.

[*Exit* MARGARET.

Tremble not, my loveliest bride,

But listen. I have heard thy simple tale

Of a fair maiden ; now do thou hear mine

Of a rough soldier. A young warrior once

Rescued an aged knight, brave to a fault,

From out the enemy's ranks. Too grateful he

For common service ; he had one bright gem

Fit for an emperor's crown,—but only one,—

Yet that he offered, and the warrior took.

Helen. What was the gem ?

Fitz-Alwyn.

A girl ! a cherub girl !

She was a child—but such a child !—so full

Of life and beauty ! sun, and wind, and dew

Had formed her like gay flowers, or gayer birds,

Or the light brilliant butterfly, that lives

In the air. She was all smiles. And he went forth

To battle with that vision, as a dream
Of gladness round him. Often on the watch
Or in the trench before a leaguered town,
Or in the pause which weighs upon the soul
After the day of battle, would that form,
In all its witchery, float around his steps,
Around his heart. Years passed, and as he saw
The laughing girls of France, he'd pause and say,
So tall must she be now.—This tale of mine
Troubles thee, sweet one.

Helen.

Oh, go on, my lord !

Prythee go on ! How little she deserved,

How little deemed—Go on.

Fitz-Alwyn.

At length came peace,

And our rude warrior turned him to his home

And his betrothed bride. His first kind friend,

The good old knight, was dead ; but he found friends

In all around her. She alone—how fair

How beautiful she was ! her charms outran

Memory and fancy ;—but so pale, so sad,

With head averted and with downcast eyes
And shivering hands that shrank from his, and speech
Short and unfrequent, and more chilling cold
Than silence—Helen, from the hour we met,
Thy thoughts have injured me. I was thy friend,
Why treat me as thy tyrant? Why delay
The story of thy love? Why tremble thus?
Why hide thy beauteous face?

Helen.

Oh, spare me now,

Fitz-Alwyn! Spare me! I have told thee all.

Fitz-Alwyn. Ay; but too late. The bridal hour is
fixed;

The guests are bidden; the huge tables groan
Already with the banquet; harp and song
Already fill the halls; already flowers
Bestrew the path where thou and thy fair maids
Shall tread; already those fair maids have donned
Their smiles and blushes. Lady Isabel,
Say, is it not too late? Must she not wed
To-morrow?

Helen. Oh, no ! no ! In mercy no !

Re-enter MARGARET with HUBERT.

Fitz-Alwyn. This is thy bridal eve. Approach,
young Sir !

Helen—my Helen—for, the first, last time,

I dare to call thee so.—Look up, dear maid !

Thou hast done rightly, wisely, kindly, Helen,

By me, by all. Nay, draw not back thy hand ;

I will but seal it with one parting kiss.—

Now take it, Hubert Knowles ! thou hast her heart ;

They shall not be divided. She is thine.

THE CAPTIVE.

A DRAMATIC SCENE.

CHARACTERS.

ALBERTO, *an usurper of the throne of Sicily.*

THEODORE, *a boy of fifteen, the rightful King.*

JULIA, *a girl of the same age, Alberto's daughter.*

SCENE, *A gloomy Chamber in a Gothic Castle in
Messina.*

THE CAPTIVE.

Enter ALBERTO and THEODORE.

Alberto. Enter and fear not, trembler. Thou shalt live.

Theodore. Ay, that I feared.

Alberto. Dost hear me, boy? I say
That thou shalt live.

Theodore. I feared so.

Alberto. Would'st thou die?

Theodore. If it pleased Heaven, most willingly. I
know

That I'm a prisoner. I shall never walk
In the sun's blessed light, or feel the touch
Of the free air, or hear the summer brook
All idly babbling to the moon, or taste

The morning breath of flowers. The thousand charms
Which make in our Sicilian Isle mere life
A thrilling pleasantness, which send a glow
Through the poorest serf that tills the happy soil—
I am shut out from all. This is my tomb.
Uncle, be merciful! I do not ask
My throne again—Reign! reign! I have forgot
That I was once a King. But let me bide
In some small woodland cottage, where green leaves
May wave around me, and cool breezes kiss
My brow. Keep me not in a dungeon, uncle,
Or this dark gloomy chamber. Let me dwell
In some wild forest. I'll not breathe a word
That might be dangerous. No! not to the birds
My songsters, or the fawns my playmates, uncle;
Thou ne'er shalt hear of me again.

Alberto.

Boy! boy!

Cling not about me thus!

Theodore.

Thou wilt have mercy!

Thy heart is softening.

Alberto. 'Tis too late.—To reign,
And he at liberty ! I am a child
Myself, that won by this child's gentleness
I seemed to waver. Boy, thy fate is fixed ;
Thyself hast said it. Thou'rt a prisoner,
And for thy whole life long ; a caged bird.
Be wiser than the feathered fool that beats
His wings against the wire. Thou shalt have all
Thy heart can ask, save freedom, and that never !
I tell thee so in love, and not in hate ;
For I would root out hope and fear, and plant
Patience in thy young soul.

Theodore. And Julia ?

Alberto. Her

Thou ne'er must see again.

Theodore. Never ! Is she

A prisoner too ? Not once to say farewell !

Alas ! alas ! that bauble of a crown,

How it makes kind hearts cruel ! Thou wast once

In all my little griefs my comforter,

And now—Not see my cousin Julia once !
Mine own dear cousin Julia ! Let me see her
Once, only once !—only to catch one sound
Of that sweet voice, and on that whitest hand
Drop one fond tear, and steal but one of the bright
And wavy ringlets from her brow, and pray
That Heaven may bless her.—Let me see her once,
But once, and then I'll walk back to my prison,
And dream away this winter of a life,
As a silly dormouse in his Christmas nest
Sleeps through his six months' night. Turn not away !
Wast thou born pitiless ?

Alberto.

No. I have quelled

That dangerous softness. Pretty boy, farewell !

Rest thee content. No harm shall happen thee.

[*Exit.*

Theodore. Content ! Oh mockery of grief ! Content !

Was't not enough to take away my crown,

To mew me up here in a living tomb,

Cut off from every human tie, from thee,

Julia, my cousin Julia ; but my jailor
Must bid me be content ! Would I were dead !
Forgive me, Heaven, for my impatience !
I will take better thoughts. 'Tis but to fancy
This room a quiet hermitage, and pray
As hermits use through the long silent hours.
I shall be innocent. Sure, he's a friend
That shuts me out from sin. Did he not call me
A caged bird ? I've seen one prune himself,
And hop from perch to perch, and chirp and sing
Merrily ! Happy fool, it had forgot
Blithe liberty ! But man, though he should drag
A captive's heavy chain, even till he starts
To hear his own sad voice, cannot forget.
He wants that blessed gift.—Is not to-day
The gay procession of the vintagers
Ere they begin their annual toil ? A relic
Of the old heathen rites ! Last year I saw it ;
'Twas a fair pageant ; one that might have graced
The famous Grecian day, with its long line

Of maidens tripping under the light load
Of grape-piled baskets on their heads, and youths
With pipes timing their steps, and younger girls
And rosy boys dragging the struggling goats,
By flow'ry garlands. Such procession well
Had honour'd the god Bacchus. *She* was there,
And in her innocent gaiety led on
The virgin troop, distinguish'd but by grace
Unrivall'd, and a wreath of brightest flowers
That crown'd her brimming basket. How she sway'd
Her pretty head to the soft double flute,
Whilst ever as she bent, the coronal
Seem'd like to fall, till with a smiling toss
She flung it up again, and danced along
With such an airiness, as if her step
Belong'd not to dull earth. Oh, loveliest maid,
Must I ne'er see thee more !

Enter JULIA, through a secret door.

Who's there ? How cam'st thou ?

Art thou indeed my cousin Julia ? Is't
Thyself, thy living self ? I cannot trust
My sight.

Julia (*giving him her hand*). Dost doubt me now ?

Theodore. No. But when first
I saw thee standing with thy pitying eyes
Fix'd on thy face, thou seem'dst an angel ! Say
How cam'st thou here ?

Julia. He,—I'll not call him father—
He, who imprisoned thee, forgot, or knew not,
The secret passage, that in one long chain
Links all the western chambers. Constance mark'd
The guarded door. Follow me.

Theodore. Where ?

Julia. To freedom !
To happiness !

Theodore. Now, blessings on thy head !
Did I not say thou wast an Angel ? Freedom !
Ay, that is happiness. A whole life's service
Were over poor to pay this debt.

Julia.

We stay

Too long. Come with me.

Theodore.

But to leave thee, sweetest,—

Perchance in danger,—for should he suspect—

No ! I'll stay here,—my very inmost soul

Thanks thee, my kindest cousin. But I'll stay,

I'll not awaken his unnatural hate

'Gainst thee. He loves thee—but he loved me once—

And mated with ambition, even his child,

His only child, were nothing. I'll stay here,

In my lone prison. Think of me as one

Freed from a cumbrous load of state and care,

Held to the world but by the undying love

That knits my soul to thine. Go and be happy,

And in thy bliss shall I be blest. We still

Shall breathe the same air, Julia. I may catch

From out my window a short stolen glance

Of thy fair form ; may hear, when distant doors

Shall chance to open, a brief passing sound

Of thy dear voice ; and sometimes thou may'st glide

Even to this gloomy chamber, bringing light,
And life, and joy. A moment since I pined
For liberty. Now I would rather dwell
In a deep dungeon, where such visions come,
Than fill a throne without them. Thou wilt deign
To visit the poor captive, wilt thou not ?
Oh, dearest, to be banished from thy sight
Were worse than death. Thou'lt come again ? But now
Away ! I fear the king.

Julia. He whom thou call'st such
Is busy at the council. Theodore,
In mercy follow me ! I too shall share
Thy flight.

Theodore. Thou ! Thou ! Oh sweetest, dearest, best !
I stand as in a dream.—Thou go with me !
Whither ? and wherefore ?

Julia. Question not ; but come.
There is a Spanish ship in harbour here,
With her sails spread for instant voyage. My Constance
And her bold captain are betroth'd. He waits

With sure disguises, and hath promised us
A safe and pleasant home in fair Castile.
A mountain hut close by a gushing spring,
Where the huge cork trees fling their heavy shade
O'er herds and flocks ; and we shall lead a calm
And happy pastoral life ; a shepherd thou
With pipe and crook, and I a cottage maid,
A careful housewife. Thou shalt see how soon
I'll learn the rustic craft, to milk my ewes
Or press the snowy curd, or haply mould
The richer cheese. Shalt thou not like, dear cousin,
To be a shepherd on the downy hills,
Tending thy flock all day, and I to bring
Water and country cates, an homely meal,
And sing and prattle at thy side, most like
A mountain bee ? I'll wager, Theodore,
I prove the thriftier peasant.

Theodore.

But to bend thee

To poor and servile toil—

Julia.

Poor ! I have here

Jewels to buy an earldom. See ! a sword too,
To guard us on the way. Take it. Dear cousin,
We waste the hour.

Theodore. My Julia, tempt me not
To selfish and ungrateful sin. The saints
May witness for me, that I ever loathed
Pomp and its slavery. The lot thou offerest
Hath been the vision of my dreamy hours
All my life long. But thou so proudly reared
So delicately served,—thou born a princess,
And nurtured like a queen, how could'st thou bear
The peasant's lowly lot ?—Had I the crown
That once prest my young brow—had I a throne
To share with thee, my fairest—but an exile—
A houseless fugitive,—Alas ! Alas !
Tempt me no more, sweet maiden ! Stay and reign
In thine own Sicily.

Julia. I'll stay and die,
Since thou dost spurn me from thee. Fare thee well !
Yet, in thy calmer thoughts,—if thou should'st think

Again on thy poor friend—Oh, deem her not
Bold or unmaidenly ! We lived and loved
As brother and as sister.—

Theodore. Far, far dearer !

Julia. And as a sister in our mutual grief
I came to thee. Oh, let us fly, dear cousin !
In pity, let us fly ! My cruel father—

Theodore. Cruel to thee ?—to thee !

Julia. Alas, to bind
The subtle traitor Lanza to his cause,
He offers up his child. Another day,
And I must wed.

Theodore. Give me the sword. Wed ! Cousin,
I'll fly with thee to the end of the earth. Wed Lanza !
Wed any man ! He must fight well that wins thee,
Boy though I be, my Julia ! Haste thee, sweet,
Each moment's worth an age. Away ! Away !

Julia. Heaven speed our steps !

Theodore. Away !

[*Exeunt.*

THE
MASQUE OF THE SEASONS,
FROM
FIESCO AND DORIA, AN UNFINISHED TRAGEDY.

Dropping kind words and kinder smiles about,
Delighting and delighted : We must join them.

THE MASQUE.

Enter SPRING.

Spring. Room for the jocund queen of new-born
flowers !

Bathed in light fragrant airs and sunny showers
I come. Beneath my steps the grass is set
With violets, cowslips, daffodils, all wet
With freshest dew as any crystal clear.
The youth, the smile, the music of the year
Am I. Who loves not Spring ? Gay songs of birds
Tell my delights, and rough uncouthest words
Of shepherds. Fairest ladies here are posies
Of crisp curled hyacinths, pale maiden roses,
And bright anemonies of richer dyes
Than rubies, amethysts, or azure eyes
Of sapphires. Summer ! hasten leafy queen !
And Autumn help to bind my garlands sheen !

Enter SUMMER.

Summer. In a green nook, whose mossy bed receives
Shade from my own unnumbered world of leaves,
I heard a voice call Summer.

Spring. Hast thou not
Brought flowery tribute? To thy favourite grot
I sent my deftest, trustiest messenger,
A dappled butterfly, whose pinions whirl
Like thy mailed beetle's. He was charged to say
That great Doria would be here to-day——
Did not that rouse thee?

Summer. Yes; his name hath won
To my deep solitudes, where scarce the sun
Can pierce the heavy umbrage. The cool places
To which the sweltering noon the wild deer chases;
The sheltered pools, which oft the swallows winglet
Skims, or where lazily her darker ringlet
Some Naiad floating in her beauty laves;
The little bubbling springs, whose tiny waves

Do murmur gently round old pollard trees,
Mingling their music with the stir of bees ;
All these are mine : mine the wild forest glade
Where the bright sun comes flickering through the shade,
Gilding the turfy wood-walks ; and his name
Is wafted through them with an odorous fame,
Balm breathing. Take my tribute. Strawberries bred
In shrubby dingles ; cherries round and red,
And flowers that love the sun.

Spring.

Sweet flowers are thine,

Carnation, pink, acacia, jessamine,
With coral budded myrtle which discloses
White pearly blossoms, and perfumed musk-roses.

Enter AUTUMN.

Autumn. Fair queens of leaves and flowers give
way to me,
To Autumn and his fruits. Do you not see
How I am laden ? Corn and grapes are here,
And olives. Of the riches of the year

I am the joyful gatherer. Merry nights
Have I at harvest time, and rare delights
When the brown vintagers beneath the trees
Dance, and drink in the sunset and the breeze.
And I have brought young tendrils of the vine
Amidst your gayer garlands to entwine
For great Doria.

Enter WINTER.

Spring. Ah! what form is this?
Stern Winter hence! Come not to mar our bliss
With frosts and tempests. Icy season hence!
See Summer sickens at thy influence,
And I can feel my coronet withering.

Winter. Hence then thyself, fair, dainty, delicate
thing!
Light fluttering playmate of the infant loves,
Mistress of butterflies and turtle doves,
Hence! and bear with thee that gay blooming toy,
To a fair girl from an enamoured boy

Fit homage, not for heroes. In this form
Thou hail'st a friend, Doria ! The wild storm
The raging of the elements, the wave
That Winter flings aloft, are to the brave
A victory and a glory. Thou hast breasted
My billows, mountain-high and foamy crested,
And vanquished them. And I can guerdon thee,
I, barren Winter, from the unfading tree
To valour consecrate. This laurel crown
Wear ! as it clips thy temples, thy renown
Will cast upon its shining leaves a light
Ineffable. Approach, ye Seasons bright,
With gifts and garlands ; let us offer here
The blended homage of the circling year.

SONNETS.



I.

WRITTEN IN A BLANK-PAPER BOOK GIVEN TO THE
AUTHOR BY A FRIEND.

My little book, as o'er thy page so white,
With half-closed eyes in idlest mood I lean,
Whose is the form that rises still between
Thy page and me,—a vision of delight ?
Look on those eyes by the bright soul made bright ;
Those curls, which who Antinous' bust hath seen
Hath loved ; that shape which might beseem a queen ;
That blush of purity ; that smile of light.
'Tis she ! my little book dost thou not own
Thy mistress ? She it is, the only she !
Dost thou not listen for the one sweet tone
Of her unrivalled voice ? Dost thou not see
Her look of love, for whose dear sake alone,
My little book, thou art so dear to me ?

II.

ON MRS. HOFLAND'S PICTURE OF JERUSALEM AT
THE TIME OF THE CRUCIFIXION.

Jerusalem ! and at the fatal hour !
No need of dull and frivolous question here !
No need of human agents to make clear
The most tremendous act of human power !
The distant cross ; the rent and falling tower ;
The opening graves, from which the dead uprear
Their buried forms ; the elemental fear
Where horrid light and horrid darkness lower ;
All tell the holy tale : the mystery
And solace of our souls. Awe-struck we gaze
On that so mute yet eloquent history !
Awe-struck and sad at length our eyes we raise
To go ;—yet oft return that scene to see
Too full of the great theme to think of praise.

III.

THE FORGET-ME-NOT.

Blossom that lov'st on shadowy banks to lie,
 Gemming the deep rank grass with flowers so blue,
 That the pure turquoise matched with their rich hue
Pales, fades, and dims ; so exquisite a dye,
That scarce the brightness of the Autumn sky,
 Which sleeps upon the bosom of the stream,
 On whose fringed margent thy star-flowerets gleam
In its clear azure with thy tints may vie ;
 Shade-loving flower, I love thee ! not alone
That thou dost haunt the greenest coolest spot,
 For ever, by the tufted alder thrown,
Or arching hazel, or vine mantled cot,
 But that thy very name hath a sweet tone
Of parting tenderness—Forget me not !

IV.

TO MR. HENRY RICHARDSON,

ON HIS PERFORMANCE OF ADMETUS IN THE ALCESTIS OF EURIPIDES,
AS REPRESENTED IN THE ORIGINAL GREEK AT READING SCHOOL.
October, 1824.

For us, on whose sealed ear the classic strain
Of Athens' tenderest bard would idly fall
As instrumental music, or the call
Of wordless nightingales, for us again
I thank thee, wondrous boy ! that not in vain
The scene hath overpast which held in thrall
Milton * and Wordsworth, mightiest names of all
Living or dead that haunt the Muses' fane !

* Milton's allusion to the Alcestis in the sonnet on his wife is well known. Mr. Wordsworth in his *Laodamia* has the following exquisite lines on the same subject.

——— " Did not Hercules by force
Wrest from the guardian monster of the tomb
Alcestis a reanimated corse,
Given back to dwell on earth in beauty's bloom ? "

Thy genius was a language ; voice and look,
 Gesture and stillness the deep mystery
 Of a strong grief unveiled. As lightnings dart
Their quivering brightness o'er the world, each nook
 Illumining and thrilling, so from thee
Burst the storm-cloud of passion on the heart.

V.

WRITTEN JULY, 1824.

How oft amid the heaped and bedded hay,
Under the oak's broad shadow deep and strong,
Have we sate listening to the noonday song
(If song it were monotonously gay)
Which crept along the field, the summer lay
Of the grasshopper. Summer is come in pride
Of fruit and flower, garlanded as a bride,
And crowned with corn, and graced with length of day.
But cold is come with her. We sit not now
Listening that merry music of the earth
Like Ariel "beneath the blossomed bough;"
But all for chillness round the social hearth
We cluster.—Hark!—a note of kindred mirth
Echoes!—Oh, wintery cricket, welcome thou!

VI.

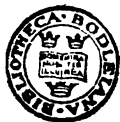
TO MY MOTHER SLEEPING.

Sleep on, my mother ! sweet and innocent dreams
Attend thee, best and dearest ! Dreams that gild
Life's clouds like setting suns, with pleasure filled
And saintly joy, such as thy mind beseems,—
Thy mind where never stormy passion gleams,
Where their soft nest the dove-like virtues build
And calmest thoughts, like violets distilled,
Their fragrance mingle with bright wisdom's beams,
Sleep on, my mother ! not the lily's bell
So sweet ; not the enamoured west-wind's sighs
That shake the dew-drop from her snowy cell
So gentle ; not that dew-drop ere it flies
So pure. E'en slumber loves with thee to dwell
Oh model most beloved of good and wise !

VII.

ON A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN.

Look where she sits in languid loveliness,
Her feet upgathered, and her turban'd brow
Bent o'er her hand, her robe in ample flow
Disparted ! Look in attitude and dress
She sits and seems an Eastern Sultanness !
And music is about her, and the glow
Of young fair faces, and sweet voices go
Forth at her call, and all about her press.
But no Sultana she ! As in a book
In that fine form and lovely brow we trace
Divinest purity, and the bright look
Of genius. Much is she in mind and face
Like the fair blossom of some woodland nook
The wind-flower *,——delicate and full of grace.



* The Hampshire name of the wood-anemone.

VIII.

TO MISS PORDEN *,

ON HER POEM OF CŒUR DE LION.

Proudly thy sex may claim thee, young and fair
And lofty poetess ! proudly may tell
How thou hast sung the arms invincible
Of him the lion-hearted, in the snare
Of Austria, as amid the sultry glare
Of Palestine, triumphant ; or the spell
Of poor Maimonne ; or the thoughts that swell
When suddenly the old remembered air
Rings from the harp of Blondel ; or the bright
And gorgeous train of England's chivalry ;
Or, worthy of his kingly foe, the might
Of paynim Saladin. Oh, proud of thee
Is woman ! proud of thy bold muse's flight !
Proud of thy gentle spirit's purity.

* My late dear and lamented friend Mrs. Francklin.

IX.

TO MR. HAYDON,

ON A STUDY FROM NATURE.

“Tears in the eyes and on the lips a sigh !”

Haydon ! the great, the beautiful, the bold,

Thy wisdom's king, thy mercy's God unfold,

There art and genius blend in union high.

But this is of the soul. The majesty

Of grief is here, grief cast in such a mould

As Niobe of yore. The tale is told

All at a glance—A childless mother I !

The tale is told :—but who can e'er forget

That e'er hath seen that visage of despair !

With unaccustom'd tears our cheeks are wet ;

Heavy our hearts with unaccounted care ;

Upon our thoughts it presses like a debt ;

We close our eyes in vain—that face is there !

X.

ENGLEFIELD HOUSE :

THE SEAT OF R. BENTON DE BEAUVOIR, ESQ. NEAR READING.

There is a pride, as of an elder day
About thee, Englefield ! midway thy steep
And wood-crowned eminence, where round thee sweep
Green flowery lawns, trees in the fresh array
Of summer, meadows with the close-piled hay
Studded, blue waters that do seem to creep
All listlessly for heat, and cots that sleep
I' the sunshine. How thou tower'st above the gay
And lovely landscape, in the majesty
Of thy old beauty ! Even those mansions bright,
That pretty town, that gothic chapelry *
With front and pinnacle so rich and light,
Seem all as toys and costly pageantry
Made but for thy proud halls and their delight.

* The new Church at Theale, a beautiful specimen of modern Gothic.

XI.

NEW YEAR'S DAY. 1819.

TO MRS. DICKINSON.

Banquet and song, and dance and revelry !—
Auspicious year born in so fair a light
Of gaiety and beauty ! happy night
Sacred to social pleasure, and to thee
Its dear dispenser, of festivity
The festive queen, the moving spirit bright
Of music and the dance, of all delight
The gentle mistress, bountiful and free.
Oh happy night ! and oh succeeding day
Far happier ! when 'mid converse and repose
Handel's sweet strains came sweetened, and the lay
Divine of that old Florentine arose,
Dante, and Genius flung his torch-like ray
O'er the dark tale of Ugolino's woes.

XII.

ON TWO OF MR. HOFLAND'S LANDSCAPES.

A mighty power is in that roaring main
Broken into huge and foamy waves, which knock
Against yon mass of battlemented rock
Dark with storm-laden cloud, and wind-tost rain.
A lovely power is in that sunny plain
Where in their beauty the clear waters sleep,
Fringed in by tender grass, or idly creep
Where the close tufted banks their course restrain.
Oh Painter of the elements ! to thee
Alike the gentle or tempestuous hour :
The throes and heavings of the wintery sea,
Whilst earth, and sky, and storm, and darkness, lour ;
Or the sweet sunshine brooding peacefully
O'er wandering rivulet and summer bower.

XIII.

ON HEARING MR. TALFOURD PLEAD IN THE ASSIZE-
HALL AT READING, ON HIS FIRST CIRCUIT,

March 1821.

Wherefore this stir ? 'Tis but a common cause
Of Cottage plunder : yet in every eye
Sits expectation ;—murmuring whispers fly
Along the crowded court ;—and then a pause ;—
And then a clear crisp voice invokes the laws,
With such a full and rapid mastery
Of sound and sense, such nice propriety,
Such pure and perfect taste, that scarce the applause
Can be to low triumphant words chained down
Or more triumphant smiles. Yes, this is he,
The young and eloquent spirit whose renown
Makes proud his birth-place ! a high destiny
Is his ; to climb to honour's palmy crown
By the strait path of truth and honesty.

XIV.

THE FISHING-SEAT, WHITEKNIGHTS.

There is a sweet according harmony
In this fair scene : this quaintly fluted bower,
These sloping banks with tree and shrub and flower
Bedecked, and these pure waters, where the sky
In its deep blueness shines so peacefully ;
Shines all unbroken, save with sudden light
When some proud swan majestically bright
Flashes her snowy beauty on the eye ;
Shines all unbroken, save with sudden shade
When from the delicate birch a dewy tear
The west-wind brushes. Even the bee's blithe trade,
The lark's clear carols, sound too loudly here ;
A spot it is for far-off music made,
Stillness and rest—a smaller Windermere.

XV.

TO A FRIEND ON HER BIRTH-DAY.

This is the day sacred to love and mirth
And tender wishes ; this the favoured day
(Sweet superstition !) when the artless lay
Is welcomed, and the token little worth,
And the fond vows, which live and have their birth
In the affectionate heart ; a holiday
It is, for good and gentle, fair and gay,
My lovely Jane, it gave thee to the earth.
And thou hast trodden life's path with a wise glee,
Maid of the laughing eye ! Were I the Queen
Of that so famous land of Faëry
Where quaintest spirits weave their spells unseen,
No better benison I'd pour on thee
Than to be happy still as thou hast been.

XVI.

ON LEAVING A FAVOURITE PICTURE.

Young world of peace and loveliness farewell !
Farewell to the clear lake ; the mountains blue ;
The grove, whose tufted paths our eyes pursue
Delighted ; the white cottage in the dell
By yon old church ; the smoke from that small cell
Amid the hills slow rising ; and the hue
Of summer air, fresh, delicate, and true,
Breathing of light and life, the master spell !
Work of the Poet's eye, the Painter's hand,
How close to nature art thou, yet how free
From earthly stain ! the beautiful, the bland,
The rose, the nightingale resemble thee ;—
Thou art most like the blissful Fairy-land
Of Spenser, or Mozart's fine melody.

XVII.

WRITTEN IN A FRIEND'S ALBUM.

Book of memorials fair ! I cannot trace

On thy white page the quaintly pencilled bower ;

I have no skill to bid the vivid flower

Bloom 'mid thy leaves ; nor with the immortal grace

Of proud Apollo, or the goddess face

Of Hebe deck them. 'Las ! my ruder power

Can but bear record faint of many an hour

Passed thou mute witness in thy dwelling-place.

Oh happiest hours, that ever me befall,

Rich in commingling mind, in fancy's play !

Oh happiest hours, whether in music's thrall,

Or converse sweet as music pass the day !

Oh happiest hours ! and most beloved of all

The cherished friend that speeds them on their way !

XVIII.

ON VISITING DONNINGTON CASTLE,

SAID TO HAVE BEEN THE LATEST RESIDENCE OF CHAUCER, AND
CELEBRATED FOR ITS RESISTANCE TO THE ARMY OF THE
PARLIAMENT DURING THE CIVIL WARS.

Oh, for some gentle spirit to surround
With clinging ivy thy high-seated towers,
Fair Donnington, and wipe from Chaucer's bowers
The last rude touch of war ! All sight, all sound
Of the old strife boon nature from the ground
Hath banished. Here the trench no longer lours,
But, like a bosky dell, begirt with flowers
And garlanded with May, sinks dimpling round

A very spot for youthful lover's dreams
In the prime hour. Grisildis' mournful lay,
The "half-told tale *" would sound still sweeter here.
Oh for some hand to hide with ivy spray
War's ravages, and chase the jarring themes
Of King and State, Roundhead and Cavalier!

" Or call up him who left half told
The story of Cambuscan bold."

Milton of Chaucer.—Il Penseroso.

XIX.

WRITTEN AFTER A VISIT FROM SOME FRIENDS.

I could have lengthened out one fleeting hour
Into an age ; sitting at set of sun
Under the long, low, open shed where won
The mellow evening light through leaf and flower ;
Playing the hostess in that summer bower
To such dear guests, whilst rose the antique song
By those young sister voices poured along
So wild, so pure, so clear, full of sweet power
Ringing and vibrating. It was a lay
That sent a smile into the very heart ;
As when the early lark shoots up in May
With his blithe matins, rarer than all art
Save this. Oh happiest and most fleeting day,
Why art thou gone so soon ! Why must we part !

XX.

ON AN INTENDED REMOVAL FROM A FAVOURITE
RESIDENCE. *November, 1820.*

Adieu, beloved and lovely home ! Adieu,
Thou pleasant mansion, and ye waters bright,
Ye lawns, ye aged elms, ye shrubberies light
(My own cotemporary trees, that grew
Even with my growth ;) ye flowers of orient hue,
A long farewell to all ! Ere fair to sight
In summer-shine ye bloom with beauty dight,
Your halls we leave for scenes untried and new.
Oh shades endeared by memory's magic power
With strange reluctance from your paths I roam !
But home lives not in lawn, or tree, or flower,
Nor dwells tenacious in one only dome.
Where smiling friends adorn the social hour,
Where they, the dearest are, there will be home.

XXI.

ON THE DEPARTURE OF A FRIEND TO LISBON FOR
THE RECOVERY OF HER HEALTH. *Nov.* 1813.

Thou freshest spirit, that on Lisbon's shore
Didst shake health-breathing airs so cheerily
From thy soft wing, as oft the murmuring bee
Scatters the full-blown rose,—the cannon's roar
Scared thee, mild spirit ! and the flood of gore,
Tinging the bosom of thy heaving sea,
Defiled thy snowy feet, and thou didst flee
From ills thou could'st not cure and must deplore.
War's demons are gone by. Thy lovely strand
Is purified. Oh spirit thither bend
Thine airy flight, and wave thy healing wand
O'er yon fair form where grace and virtue blend !
Then proudly waft her to her native land—
Her, loved and blest, the mother, wife and friend.

XXII.

WRITTEN OCTOBER, 1825.

Within my little garden is a flower,
A tuft of flowers, most like a sheaf of corn,
The lilac blossomed daisy that is born
At Michaelmas, wrought by the gentle power
Of this sweet Autumn into one bright shower
Of bloomy beauty ; Spring hath nought more fair,
Four sister butterflies inhabit there,
Gay gentle creatures ! Round that odorous bower
They weave their dance of joy the livelong day,
Seeming to bless the sunshine ; and at night
Fold their enamelled wings as if to pray.
Home-loving pretty ones ! would that I might
For richer gifts as cheerful tribute pay,
So meet the rising dawn, so hail the parting ray !

SONGS.



I.

Evening's richest colours glowing
Skirt the golden West ;
Snowy clouds, like vapours flowing,
Crown its beamy crest.
I've nothing seen so rosy red,
Nor aught so brightly pure,
Since Laura's cheek with blushes spread,
And Laura's brow demure.

O'er its pebbly channel creeping
Flows the murmuring tide ;
Through the gloomy pine-grove sweeping
Twilight breezes glide.
I've heard no sound so softly clear,
Nor breathed such balmy air,
Since the sweet voice of Laura dear,
The sigh of Laura fair.

II.

Sweet is the balmy evening hour ;
And mild the glow-worm's light ;
And soft the breeze that sweeps the flower,
With pearly dew-drops bright.

I love to loiter by the rill
And catch each trembling ray ;—
Fair as they are, they mind me still
Of fairer things than they.

What is the breath of closing flowers
But feeling's gentlest sigh ?
What are the dew-drop's crystal showers
But tears from pity's eye ?
What are the glow-worms by the rill
But fancy's flashes gay ?
I love them, for they mind me still
Of one more fair than they.

III.

'Tis a gay summer morn, and the sunbeams dance
On the glittering waves of the rapid Durance,
Where Sir Reginald's castle its broad shadow throws
O'er the bay and the linden, the cypress and rose.
And in that rosy bower a lady so bright
Sits telling her beads for her own absent knight,
Whilst her little son plays round the fond mother's knee
And the wandering stock-dove is scared by his glee.

'Tis a calm summer eve, and the moonbeams dance
On the glittering waves of the rapid Durance,
Where Sir Reginald's castle its broad shadow throws
O'er the bay and the linden, the cypress and rose.
But the pitiless spoiler is master there,
For gone is the lady, and gone the young heir;
The good knight hath perished beyond the salt sea,
And they, like the stock-dove, poor wanderers be.

IV.

The lily bells are wet with dew,

The morning sunbeams kiss the rose,
And rich of scent and bright of hue

The summer garden glows.

Then up, and weave a garland, sweet,

To braid thy raven hair,

Before the noontide's withering heat

Strike on those flowerets fair.

A flickering cloud is in the sky,

A murmuring whisper in the gale ;

They tell that stormy rain is nigh,

Or desolating hail.

Then up, and weave a garland, sweet,

To deck thy glossy hair,

Nor wait till evening tempests beat

Upon those flowerets fair.

V.

With hound and horn and huntsman's call
They chase the fallow deer ;—
And thou, the noblest of them all,
Why dost thou loiter here ?

Thou canst not deem within her bower
Thine own true love to see ;—
Dost thou not know at matin hour
I ne'er can come to thee ?

My sister's voice is on the stair,
All in her maiden glee ;
My mother's flitting every where,
And calling still on me.

My father's by the southern wall,
Pruning the old vine tree ;
My brothers playing in the hall ;—
And all are wanting me.

Then off, and mount thy gallant steed
To hunt the fallow deer ;
Off, off, and join the chase with speed,
Nor loiter longer here.

At eventide my mother sits,
Her knitting on her knee,
And wakes by starts, and dreams by fits ;—
But never dreams of me.

At eventide my sister fair
Steals to the great oak tree ;
I may not tell who meets her there,—
But nought want they of me.

At eventide, beside the bowl,
With some old comrade free,
My father many a song doth troll
But never thinks on me.

Off, then, with hound, and echoing horn
To chase the fallow deer ;—
Nor deem again at peep of morn
To meet thy true-love here.



ANTIGONE.

A PORTRAIT IN VERSE.

**FROM THE CÆDIPUS TYRANNUS, THE CÆDIPUS COLONEUS, AND THE
ANTIGONE OF SOPHOCLES.**



ANTIGONE.

'Twas noon ; beneath the ardent ray
Proud Thebes in all her glory lay ;
On pillar'd porch, on marble wall,
On temple, portico, and hall,
The summer sunbeams gaily fall,
Bathing, as in a flood of light,
Each sculptured frieze and column bright.
Dirce's pure stream meanders there,
A silver mirror clear and fair ;
Now giving back the deep-blue sky,
And now the city proud and high,
And now the sacred grove ;

And sometimes on its wave a shade,
Making the light more lovely, play'd,
 When some close-brooding dove
Flew from her nest, on rapid wing,
For needful food across the spring,
 Or sought her home of love.
The very air in that calm hour,
Seem'd trembling with the conscious power
 Of its own balminess ;
The herbage, if by light foot press'd,
Sent up sweet odours from its breast ;—
 Sure, if coy happiness
E'er dwelt on earth, 'twas in that clime
Of beauty, in that noon-day prime
 Of thrilling pleasantness !

But who are they before the gate
Of Thebes convened in silent state ?
Sad grey-haired men, with looks bow'd down,
Slaves to a tyrant's haughty frown ;

And he the wicked king, and she
The royal maid Antigone,
Passing to death. Awhile she laid
Her clasp'd hands on her heart, and stay'd
Her firmer step, as if to look
On the fair world which she forsook ;
And then the sunbeams on her face
Fell, as on sculptured Nymph or Grace,
Lighting her features with a glow
That seemed to mock their patient woe.

She stay'd her onward step, and stood
A moment's space ;—oh, what a flood
Of recollected anguish stole
In that brief moment o'er her soul !
The concentrated grief of years,
The mystery, horror, guilt, and tears,
The story of her life past by,
E'en in the heaving of a sigh !

She thought upon the blissful hour
Of infancy, when, as a flower
Set in the sun, she grew,
Without a fear, without a care,
Enjoying, innocent and fair,
As buoyant as the mountain air,
As pure as morning dew ;
'Till burst at once like lightning's flame,
The tale we tremble but to name,
Of them from whom her being came,
Poor Œdipus, and one,
The wretched yet unconscious dame,
Who wedded with her son !
Then horror fast on horror rose :
She maddening died beneath her woes,
Whilst crownless, sightless, hopeless, *he*
Dared to outlive that agony.
Through many a trackless path and wild
The blind man and his duteous child

Wandered, till pitying Theseus gave
The shelter brief, the mystic grave.

One weary heart finds rest at last :

But, when to Thebes the maiden pass'd,

The god's stern wrath was there :—

Her brothers each by other slain,

And one upon the bloody plain

Left festering in the sun and rain,

Tainting the very air :

For none, the haughty Creon said,

On pain of death should yield the dead

Burial, or tear, or sigh ;

And, for alone she feebly strove

To pay the decent rites of love,

The pious maid must die.

She paus'd—and in that moment rose

As in a mirror all her woes ;

She spake,—the flush across her cheek

Told of the woe she would not speak,

* As a brief thought of Hæmon stole
With bitter love across her soul.
“ I die,—and what is death to me
But freedom from long misery ?
Joyful to fall before my time,
I die ; and, tyrant, hear my crime :
I did but strive his limbs to shield
From the gaunt prowlers of the field ;
I did but weave, as nature weaves,
A shroud of grass and moss and leaves ;
I did but scatter dust to dust,

* Antigone was beloved by Hæmon the son of the tyrant Creon, who, after the death of his mistress, killed himself for grief. In the fine play of Sophocles, Antigone only once alludes to her unhappy lover :

“ Oh my dearest Hæmon !

And is it thus thy father doth disgrace thee ?”

In the original her complaint consists but of one line, which, as the translator, Dr. Francklin, observes, “ a modern writer would have spun out to many a page.”

As the desert wind on marble bust ;
I did but as the patient wren
And the kind redbreast do for men.
I die—and what is death to me ?
But tremble in thy tyranny,
Tyrant ! and ye, base slaves of power,
Tremble at freedom's coming hour !
I die—and death is bliss to me !"
Then, with a step erect and free,
With brow upraised and even breath,
The royal virgin passed to death.



INDEPENDENCE.

These stanzas were occasioned by reading the following paragraph in an old magazine. "There now resides in Cawsand a man who has not slept in a bed for thirty years. He was a sailor in his youth and unfortunate. He always refused an asylum in the workhouse, subsisting on the miserable pittance of two-pence or three-pence a day, earned by carrying pitchers of water, and indignantly preferring this to living by the bounty of others. In the coldest night of winter he would sleep under a boat on the beach of Cawsand; at other times he took refuge in the cliffs of the rocks, and couched himself with the raven and the otter." I have endeavoured to give more animation to this little poem, by putting the sentiments into the mouth of the hero of the tale; the anecdote itself seems to me a fine instance of English spirit.



INDEPENDENCE.

“ Talk not to me of food or bed

Or the warm winter coat :—

Whence comes the meat with which you're fed ?

What does that dress denote ?

“ What is that room from storms aloof

In which so snug you lie ?

What are they all, coat, bed and roof ?

Badges of slavery.

“ Must you not cringe and beg and fawn,

Slave even to the clocks,

Your matin call the bolts undrawn,

Your vesper creaking locks ?

“ Must you not in that house miscalled
Of miserable sloth,—
Your mind and body both enthralled,
Degraded, sunken both ;—

“ Must you not bear the bitter taunt
Of oft imputed blame ?
Your only crimes old age and want !
Disease your only shame !

“ Must you not crouching ask the boon
Avarice is forced to give ;
And hear them calculate how soon
You'll die, how long can live ?

“ And must you not—Oh direst woe !—
Seem grateful, bow and smile,
Thank them from whom those blessings flow,
Soothe, flatter, and beguile ?

“ And would you have me such as you ?

Me, from whose honest tongue

No sentence consciously untrue

From youth to age has sprung !

“ And would you court me to your home

In joyless prison pent ?

Me, when all kingdoms I can roam,

And find in all content !

“ What though I draw for scanty gain

Fresh water from the spring ;——

Did she, of Isaac loved, disdain

An equal load to bring ?

“ What though my clothes in squalid rags

Hang fluttering to my knee ;—

They breathe, like sea-weed on the crags,

The air of liberty.

“ Free as that buoyant breeze I rove,
All nature's joys my own,
See earth and sky, the clouds above,
The rocks in masses thrown.

“ At summer's eve those rocks among
I with the otter lie ;
The sea-mew's cry my evening song,
The wave my lullaby.

“ The moonbeams falling on my form,
The spray that dews my hair,
The breathing of the summer storm,
All, all to me are fair.

“ And when in wintry nights I creep
Beneath the sheltering boat,
And feel my ice-bound fingers sleep,
And doff my frozen coat,

“ What though I lack reviving food,
 Though bare my aged form,
‘Till life be o’er the freeman’s blood
 Shall keep his bosom warm.

“ But frozen, stagnate, would it chill
 In thy stern prison pent.
Away ! I’ll keep my treasures still,
 Peace, freedom, and content.”



WATLINGTON HILL :

A DESCRIPTIVE POEM.

The two following poems, slight and imperfect as they are, require, perhaps even more than the rest of this little volume, the kind indulgence of the reader. They were written many years ago, and are inserted chiefly from a wish to preserve some sketch, however rude, of very beautiful scenery, and some memorial, however inadequate, of very dear and valuable friends.

WATLINGTON HILL.

I.

'Tis pleasant to dance in lordly hall
When the merry harp is-ringing ;
'Tis sweet in the bower at evening's fall
To list to the night-bird's singing ;
'Tis lovely to view the autumnal hue
As it gilds the woodland mountain ;
Or when summer glows to pluck the rose
And quaff from the sparkling fountain.
But fatigue in pleasure's guise is clad ;
And the song so sweet makes the light heart sad ;
And autumn tells of joys that fly ;
And summer's charms in languor die :

If ye would have all hope can bring,
Take the first morn of early spring !
If ye would warm your life-blood chill,
Go course on Watlington's fair hill !

II.

The mountain gale the vapour flings
Aloft upon his giant wings :
And now the sun in high career,
Wakens a thousand dew-drops clear,
That in their downy moss-couch sleep,
Or from the trembling grass-top weep.
O lovelier than the brightest gem
That shines in princely diadem,
How transient is thy sway ;
Sportsmen and steeds, and hounds and hare,
Hunters and hunted from thy lair
Shall drive thee, diamond of the air,
And sweep thy charms away.

And yet, in sooth, upon the hill
Thy glittering place they better fill :
 Upon the shelving mossy side,
 And on the furze-clad steep,
The impatient horsemen gaily ride,
The gallant dogs reluctant bide,
And ladies fair, though storms betide,
 Their anxious station keep.

III.

Greyhounds are there of noble name,
Coursers who equal praise may claim,
And many a bright and gentle dame.
 Oh could my rustic string
Their beauty and their feats proclaim,
And give and steal the minstrel's fame
 Of all, of each my harp should ring !
But light as he the strain should spring
 That sings the greyhound rare ;

And soft as beauty's plummy wing
The lay that paints the fair ;
Whilst harsh and rude the notes I fling,—
Coursing nor beauty dare I sing,
The greyhound nor the hare.
Yet well each gentle maid may spy
Her triumphs in her lover's eye ;
And ye, kind sportsmen, well may claim
For gallant dogs scarce-rivalled fame.
And durst I sing, in venturous guise,
Of ricks and turns, and falls and byes,
And all the courser's mysteries,
Then should the swan-necked *Nancy* show
As spotless as her fur of snow ;
Then should the *Sharks* successive reign
And all their master's fame sustain ;
Nor *Windsor* shame his breeding high ;
Nor thou thy name, Northumbrian *Fly* ;
Nor thou *Prince Hal*, thy name-sake old
“ The nimble-footed madcap ” bold ;

Nor thou the meed thy mother won,
My golden crested *Marmion* *.

IV.

Leave we them all : to stand awhile
Upon the topmost brow,
And mark how, many a lengthening mile,
The landscape spreads below.
Here let us stand ! The breezes chill
A healthful freshness breathe,
The blood with stirring quickness fill,
And fancy's garlands aid to wreathe.
How pure, how transient is the storm !
See in yon furze poor puss's form
A vacant cradle seems,
Rocked by the loud wind to and fro ;
Whilst the coy primrose blooms below
Nursed by the southern beams ;

* Celebrated greyhounds belonging to different gentlemen who formed the party.

And overhead in richer gold
The gorse's hardy flowers unfold
Training wild wreaths most sweet, most fair,
To hang above her mountain lair.

V.

Methinks I too should love to dwell
Within this lone and cloud-capped cell :
With all around of vast and rude,—
A wild romantic solitude ;
With all below to charm the eye ;
With nought above me but the sky.
Here would I watch each sailing cloud
Scudding along in grandeur proud ;
And mark the varying shadows cast
On down or fallow as it past ;
Or view the sudden catching light
Now part the shades and now unite ;
Till noon's refulgent brightness spread
Its glories o'er the mountain's head :

Then would I bend from my high place
To gaze upon the horizon's space,
A tract sublime of various grace.

VI.

Yet first the charmed eye would greet
The lowland home-scenes vallies sweet,
Of wood and turf and field ;
Where the snug cot, the lordly seat
Like grandeur and contentment meet
And mutual beauty yield.
And first would trace the winding road
Which through the beech-wood leads
By red-cloaked maids and ploughmen trod,
Rich wains and prancing steeds.
And first admire those beechen trees,
Whose upper branches in the breeze
All bare and polished seem to freeze ;
Whilst, feathered like an archer's barb,
Each lower bough in saffron garb,

Catches the rain-drops as they fall
And answers to the night-wind's call.
Among those woods one chimney white
Just glances in the southern light,
Deep bosomed in the impervious glades
The fairy bower of Brittwell's shades *.
Is it the woodman's fair retreat
Where merry children sport ?
Or the rough keeper's jovial seat,
Where hounds and huntsman frequent meet,
And hold their sylvan court ?
Is it the laugh of infants gay,
Shaking the forest with their play,
That wakes the echoes round ?
Or trampling steeds at break of day,
The noisy pack, the clarion's lay ?
What wakes thy voice, coy echo, say ?
It is a holier sound.

* Brittwell Nunnery. The retreat of several aged nuns, who were driven from France by the Revolution.

VII.

There, from their native country driven,
The nuns' sweet vespers rise to heaven.
Exiles of France ! in early life
They fled the world's tumultuous strife,
To find within a convent's breast
The present calm, the future blest.
They sought for peace, and peace they found,
Till impious Havock glaring round
Of earth, of heaven the ties unbound,
 And said, maids ye are free !
But freedom's prostituted sound
 To them was misery.
Chased from their voluntary prison,
They seemed as from some earthquake risen,
Where all they loved, where all they knew
Had vanished from their tear-dimmed view.
Nor place to sit them down and pray,
Nor friends, nor home, nor grave had they.

Sickening at war's tumultuous din
They fled that clime of woe and sin ;
And here they dwell, the pious band,
Honoured and safe in Albion's land ;
And though perchance a casual tear
Fall for the convent once so dear,
Yet sweet contentment's patient smile
Shall grace each placid cheek the while ;
Here, where they keep their holy vow,
Here is their native country now :
For here, though all unknown the tongue,
The tenderest sound of welcome rung ;
Here pity beams in every eye ;
Here blest they live—more blest shall die.

VIII.

From pious Brittwell pass we now
At freedom's honoured shrine to bow

On Chalgrove's neighbouring field * ;
An undistinguished speck it seems
Where scarce the sun's refulgent beams
One spark of light can yield ;
A common spot of earth, where grows
In summer time the yellow corn ;
Where now his grain the seedsman throws
With careful hand from early morn ;
Yet pauses midst his toil to tell
That in that field bold Hampden fell.
Hampden ! thy name from age to age
The patriot heart shall fire ;
The good, the fair, the brave, the sage
All weep thy funeral pyre.
Thy very enemy confest
The virtues of thy noble breast † ;
Hard as it is amid the jar
Of falling thrones, of civil war

* The spot where Hampden fell.

† See the character of Hampden in Lord Clarendon's History.

To judge of man's inconstant state,
Even he confessed thee good and great.
How was the Stuart fallen, when thou
Didst brave his power with dauntless brow !
How raised when Falkland by him stood
As great as thou, as wise, as good !
Oh who, by equal fame misled,
Who shall the righteous cause decide,
When for his king Lord Falkland bled,
When Hampden for his country died !

IX.

How boldly yonder cloud so bright
Throws out that clump of trees ;
Scarce, till it crost the ethereal light,
Like the wren's plume on snow-ridge white,
The keenest eye that wood could seize.
'Tis distant Farringdon I deem ;
And far below Thames' silver stream

Thrids through the fair romantic bridge
Of Wallingford's old town ;
And high above the Whittenham ridge
Seems the gay scene to crown.
But what is that, which to the right,
Upon the horizon's utmost verge,
A fairy picture glitters bright,
Like sea-foam on the crested surge ?
Is it the varying fleecy cloud
That takes in sport the figure proud,
Where domes and turrets seem to rise,
And spiry steeples mock our eyes ?
No ; real is that lovely scene,
'Tis England's boast, 'tis learning's Queen,
'Tis Oxford. Not the unlettered maid
May dare approach her hallowed shade ;
Nor chant a requiem to each name
That wakened there to deathless fame ;
Nor bid the Muse's blessing rest
For ever in her honoured breast.

X.

Oh, when I dared the Muse to name
Did it not wake my spirit's flame?
Did it not guide my eye, my soul
To yonder distant shadowy knoll?
And whisper in each joyous thrill
'Tis Milton's home, 'tis Forest Hill * ?
Yes, there he lived, and there he sung,
When life and hope and love were young;
There, grace and genius at his side,
He won his half-disdainful bride;
And there the lark "in spite of sorrow,"
Still at his "window bade good morrow
"Through the sweet-briar, or the vine,
Or the twisted eglantine."

* The village from which Milton married his first wife, Miss Mary Powel, and the supposed scene of *L'Allegro*. For a very interesting account of this interesting spot the reader is referred to a letter from Sir William Jones to Lady Spencer, contained in Lord Teignmouth's edition of Sir William Jones's Works.

Oh happy hill ! thy summer vest
Lives in his richest colouring drest ;
Oh happy hill ! thou saw'st him blest.
Thou saw'st him blest, the greatest man
That ever trod life's grovelling span—
Shakspeare alone with him could try,
Undazzled and untired the sky.

And thou didst view his blooming charm,
That eagle plumed like the dove,
Whose very sleeping grace could warm
The Italian maiden's heart to love *.
Thou saw'st him in his happier hour,
When life was love, and genius power ;

* In Mr. Todd's *Life of Milton* there is a wild romantic story of an Italian lady of high birth, who in travelling through England saw Milton, then very young, asleep upon a bank. Enamoured of his beauty, she wrote some verses expressive of her admiration, laid them on his hand, and left him still sleeping. This incident is said to have occasioned his travels in Italy, where he hoped to meet his unknown fair one ; and to have been the first cause of his assiduous cultivation of Italian literature, afterwards so dear to him for its own sake.

When at his touch the awakened string
All joyous hailed the laughing spring ;
And, like the sun, his radiant eyes
Glanced on thy earthly Paradise.
Thou didst not see those eyes so bright
For ever quenched in cheerless night ;
Thou didst not hear his anguished lays
Of " evil tongues and evil days ;"
Thou saw'st but his gay youth, fair spot—
Happiest for what thou sawest not.
And happy still ! Though in thy sod
No blade remain by Milton trod ;
Though the sweet gale that sweeps thy plain
No touch of Milton's breath retain ;
Yet here the bards of later days
Shall roam to view thee and to praise.
Here Jones, ere yet his voice was fame,
A lone romantic votary came ;
He too is gone, untimely gone !
But lured by him full many a one

Shall tread thy hill on pilgrimage ;
And minstrel, patriot, or sage,
Who bent not o'er his Indian bier,
Shall mourn him with his Milton here :
For till our English tongue be dead,
From freedom's breast till life be fled,
Till Poesy's quick pulse be still
None shall forsake thee, Forest Hill.

XI.

Few are the scenes of power to chain
The rapt enthusiast's mind,
Like that where Milton's wondrous strain
Still seems to linger o'er the plain
Or whisper in the wind.
Not pent within the crowded town,
Where meanness sweeps away renown ;
But fresh, and innocent, and fair,
As if the mighty master there
Still flung his witch-notes on the air.

Yet taste and fancy's visions gay
Life's deeper feelings shun,
And fade at friendship's light away,
Like stars before the sun.
The spirits of the honour'd dead
Before one living form have fled :
For here beneath fair Sherburn's shade *
My Zosia dwelt, my Polish maid,
My friend most tender and most true,
My friend ere friendship's name we knew ;
The partner of those blissful hours
When the world seemed one bank of flowers,
Life but a summer's cloudless morn,
And love a rose without a thorn.
Fleeting as that illusive day,
Was friendship's joy, was Zosia's stay ;

* Sherburn Lodge, the seat of the late Countess Dowager of Macclesfield, under whose care Zosia Choynowska, the early and beloved friend of the author was placed for education.

For when o'er her majestic form
Youth shed his mantling roses warm,
When beauty saw her work matured,
And grandeur awed whom grace allured,
The imperious mandate harshly bore
The finished charmer from our shore;
Bore her from friendship, bliss, and love,
Envy, neglect, contempt to prove
From hearts, who frozen as their clime,
Would antedate the work of time,
And nip her beauties in their prime.
Oh, ever-loved, return again !
Return ! and soon the blooming train
Of childish friends shall meet to share
Thy soft caress, my Polish fair !
Again shall view thy sparkling eye
And Empress-form admiringly ;
Each emulously crowding round ;
Each listening for one silver sound ;

And thou to all, with Queen-like smile,
Wilt sweet attention shew the while,
Of kindness full and courtesy ;
Though one alone,—Oh happiest she !—
Scarce from thy tongue shall greeting hear,
Or find thy love, but in thy tear.
The dews of heaven fall not so sweet
As friendship's tears with joy replete ;
Haste on my breast such dews to rain,
My ever-loved, return again !

XII.

The pause hath checked my spirit glad,—
Deep doubting hope is ever sad ;
But sadder thoughts now intervene
To cloud that sweet and tranquil scene.
Direr than absence is the foe
Who waits to give the fatal blow ;

Weeping within that mansion fair
Sits filial love, Death hovers there.
He comes not now to lead the bloom
Of youth to an undreaded tomb ;
He comes not now to tame the pride
Of matron health confirmed and tried ;
Not towering man provokes his rage ;
'Tis woman, feebleness, and age.
And yet nor beauty early cropped,
Nor manhood's strength untimely dropped,
Could waken more regretful sighs
Or more with sorrow blend surprise.
For she, his noble prey, had stood
Like an old oak in Sherburn wood.
In deepest verdure richly decked
Whose ample branches waved unchecked ;
And though dead boughs commingling grew,
Abrupt and bare, of darker hue ;
Though weeds minute and yellow moss
With varied tints the bark emboss ;—

Yet lovely was its pleasant shade ;
Lovely the trunk with moss inlaid ;
Lovely the long-haired lichens grey ;
Lovely its pride and its decay.
Such Macclesfield thou wast ! Old Time
Himself had spared thy beamy prime
Uninjured, as on Greece's strand
He views the works of Phidias' hand,
And bids the sun, the dews, the air
Perfection's noblest image spare.
So time had passed o'er thee, bright dame ;
All changed, but thou wast still the same,
Still skilled to give the fading flower
More brilliant life by painting's power ;
Still skilled the nimble steel to ply
With quick inventive industry ;
Still skilled to frame the moral rhyme,
Or point with Gospel truths the lay sublime.
And rarer yet, 'mid age's frost
The fire of youth thou had'st not lost ;

Still at another's bliss could'st glow ;
Still melt to hear another's woe ;
Still give the poor man's cares relief ;
Still bend to soothe the mourner's grief.
Though near a century's course had sped
And bleached thy venerable head,
By age's vice and woe untold
Thy years remained—thou wast not old !
And so to live, and so to die,
Is endless rare felicity.
But there is one *, whose ready tear
Bedews thy pale cheek on thy bier ;
One shrinking from the admiring gaze,
Whom I may love but dare not praise.
Oh friend of Zosia ! friend of all
Whom misery, pain, and want enthrall !
Be comforted. Though ne'er again
Thy mother's hand thy hand shall strain,

* The Right Honourable Lady Mary Parker ; now, alas ! also dead.

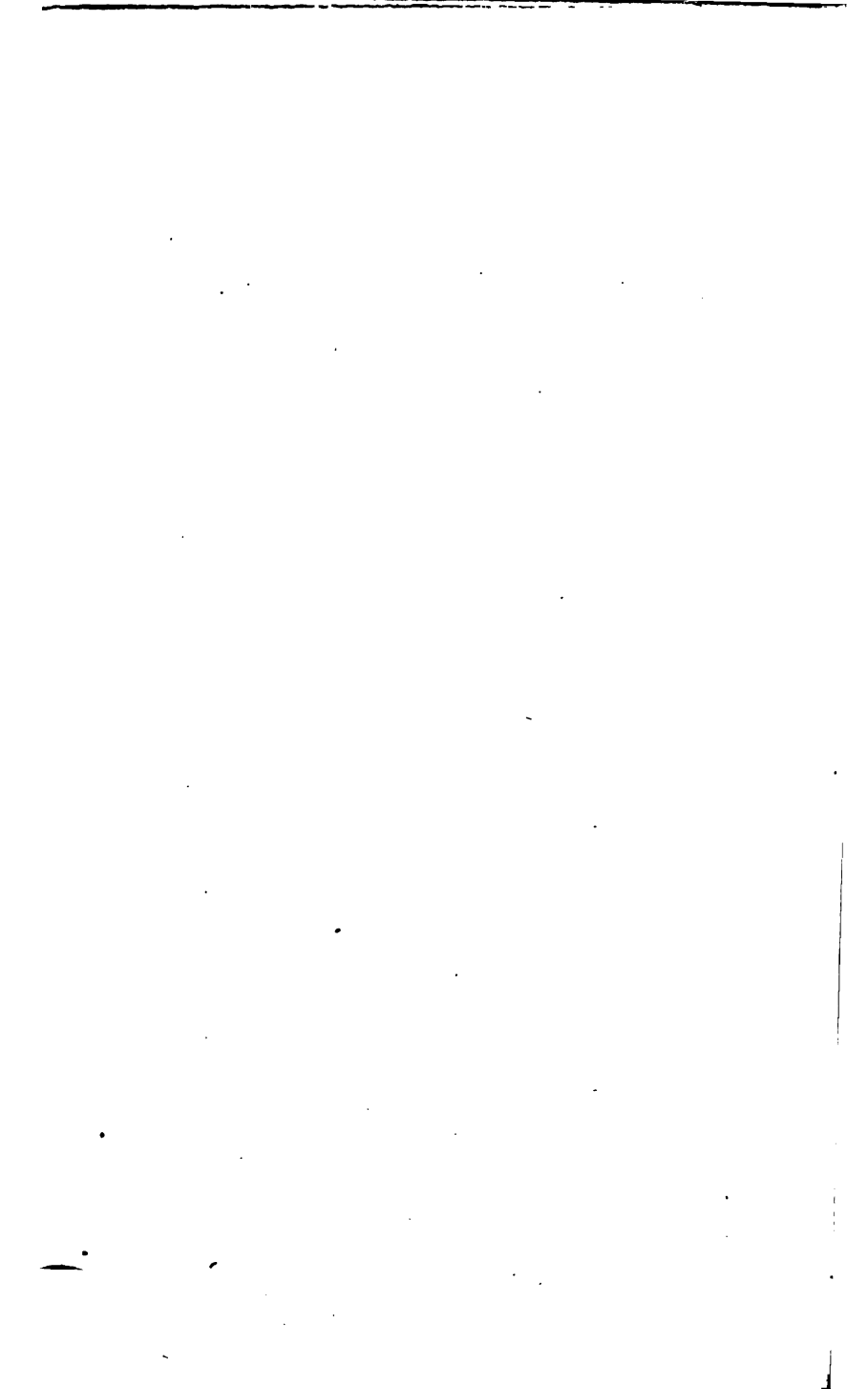
Though never shall she feel thy cares,
Congenial joys her spirit shares,—
Congenial, yet superior, given
By sister Angels in her native Heaven.
Oh who would weep the loved-one dead
When death is bliss ! Be comforted.

XIII.

Why thus in fond though vain relief
With weeping praise perpetuate grief ?
Why, on the dead, the absent Muse,
And joy from present friends refuse ?
Why dwell on yonder mournful dome,
And shun those friends' delightful home ?
'Twere hard to sing thy varying charm,
Thou Cottage, Mansion, Village, Farm *,

* Watlington Farm, the residence of the late William Hayward, Esq. It is saddening to reflect that of the circle of friends for whose amusement this little poem was originally written, scarcely one now remains alive.

Thou beautiful epitome
Of all that useful is and rare,
Where Comfort sits with smiling air,
And laughing Hospitality.
'Twere hard to sing,—and harder still
The dearer charms those halls that fill.
'Twere hard to sing,—the sun is low,
Quick to the lovely Farm we go,
Its strongest spells to find ;
And clustered round the blazing fire,
When Beauty, Music, Wit inspire,
Oh they that learn not to admire
Dull must they be, and deaf, and blind !



WESTON GROVE.

A DESCRIPTIVE POEM.



WESTON GROVE *.



I.

Who hath not met in meadows gay

Th' illusive touch of morn,

The freshness of the dewy spray,

The matin lark's melodious lay,

The brightness of the herald ray,

Which tells that day is born ?

Who hath not sought the mellow glow

The topaz-tinted beam

Whose lambent glories seem to grow

Lapping the woods above, below,

In evening's golden stream ?

* The beautiful seat of William Chamberlayne, Esq. M.P. on the
Southampton Water.

Who hath not marked the river pale
Just gleaming through night's misty veil ?
Some scenes morn's chastened beams require ;
And some rich evening's tints of fire ;
 And some the silvery moon :
The fairest still, like ladies bright,
Look loveliest in the clearest light !—
Ye who would gaze from Weston's height
 Go seek its shade at noon.

II.

'Tis now the very hour to see
That scene of wide-spread witchery :
For now on Weston's verdant side
 Meridian radiance straying,
Seems through the colonnade to glide,
Or 'mid the tufted arbours slide
Like ringlets on the snowy pride
 Of beauty's bosom playing.

Whilst o'er the pure and deep blue sky
The fleecy clouds like smoke-wreaths fly,
Borne lightly on the sweetest gale
That ever filled the swelling sail.
Bright as the sun that landscape proud
Extends ; and various as the cloud.
I might as soon describe a dream
As tell where falls each golden beam ;
As soon might reckon up the sand,
Sweet Weston, on thy sea-beat strand,
As count each beauty there ;
Hills which the purple heath-bell shield,
Forest and village, lawn and field,
Ocean and earth, with all they yield
Of glorious or of fair.

III.

Yet e'en amid that brilliant scene
Close to the left one wood so green

Fixes the wandering eye :
Fringing the margin of the waves,
Southampton's tide its verdure laves,
Whilst one small fort the fury braves
Of wind, and sea, and sky.
Even to behold that solemn shade,
" For melancholy musing made,"
The pensive heart would inly say
There the world-weary wretch may stray,
There best in Nature's temple pray.
And there in Netley's mouldering cells
The solitary nightbird dwells ;
There in each moss-grown stone we trace
The pious tenants of the place ;
There in each lingering footstep tread
Upon the unmonumented dead.
Yes, image of Rome's fallen power,
This, this is Netley's hallowed bower !
And it is holy still. Each wall
And silent aisle and roofless hall,

The chapel, where luxuriant trees
Wave proudly in the sighing breeze,
Each gothic arch and fretted nich,
And venerable window rich,
Where deftly ivy wreaths supply
The light and graceful tracery,
Each stone decayed, and tottering stair,
Each mark of ruined grandeur there
All to the charmed heart whisper prayer.
Methinks that e'en from Netley's gloom
To look upon the tide
Seems gazing from the shadowy tomb
On life in all its pride.
And aching with the o'erpowering light
The mind shrinks dazzled from the sight.

IV.

Yet soon the buoyant spirit springs
On hope and joy's exulting wings

That lovely wave to view ;
Its shores with softest verdure green,
Seats, cots, and villages between,
And graceful boats and vessels sheen
Spotting its surface blue.
And now that brighter beauty gleams,
From the sweet air and sparkling beams,
How pleasant 'twere to tempt the breeze
And on these smooth undangerous seas
In mimic danger ride ;
To hear the freshening summer gale,
Whistling and flapping in the sail,
And mock the feathery billows pale
Dash o'er the rocking side ;
Whilst, gilding strand, and wood, and ground,
The glorious sunbeams dance around,
And turn to lovely mockery
The chiding of the angry sea.

V.

'Tis hard such cheerful scenes to leave :

But sweeter far it is at eve,

When the vexed billows cease to heave,

When sleeps th' untroubled air,

Upon the glassy wave to glide,

Scarce conscious of the gentle tide,

That ripples still the boat beside,

So silent and-so fair :

So silent, that the light oar seems

To break on evening's fairy dreams ;

So fair, that e'en where brightest streams

The moon's long radiance o'er the flood,

Where Calshot spreads its nightly beams

Or cottage fires peep through the wood,

Though lovely every starlike ray

They match not that small pearly spray.

Oh, 'tis in such a moonlight hour

That Music best asserts her power !

Then if the mellow flute prolong
Some wandering note, some artless song,
Renewed and broken like the strains
When the lorn nightingale complains ;
Or woman's voice such sweetness pour
As soothes the Adriatic shore,
What time the rapt Venetian woos
The magic of his Tasso's muse ;
Then more than passion's strong controul
It lulls, it charms, it lifts the soul ;
It strikes the chords with feeling fraught ;
It stirs the living spring of thought ;
And to the syren fancy flings
Dreams of unutterable things,
Forms, which like summer lightning fly,
And tints, which like the rainbow die.

VI.

Oh gentlest wave ! upon thy breast
Pleasure's light burthens love to rest,

Mixed only with the lazy raft,
Or the laborious fisher's craft.
Thee war defiles not, blessed wave !
No, though the very drops that lave
Thy peaceful shores have bathed the side
 Of many a ship of war ;
Though thou hast viewed our navy ride
In peerless triumph o'er the tide,
Thou saw'st unstained the ensanguined pride,
 Thou heard'st the guns afar.
Spithead's long moving forest here
 Just breaks the cloudy line,
As gleams the grass-top's slender spear
In horizontal sunset clear,
 As taper and as fine.
And yonder ship in proud array
 That by St. Helen's floats,
Yon Indiaman with pennons gay
 Her barges and her boats ;

She scarcely to the straining eye
Seems more of space to occupy
Than one small flake of gossamer
That flies ere one can say 'tis there !

VII.

That ship were beautiful to see
In all her gorgeous majesty :
Her streamers glittering in the sun,
Her topsails to the breezes bent,—
A Queen let loose her course to run,
And rein each stubborn element.
But many a cheek is pale with fears,
And many an eye is wet with tears
That gazes on her charms ;—
The mother, to whose aching breast
The livelong night her boy was prest,
Now folds her childless arms
Condemned through long long years to trace
The anguish of that last embrace.

There the betrothed maiden caught
The fond, the parting vow,
Scarce had she owned one tender thought,
Scarce breathed a sigh till now ;
Till now that on the crowded deck
She hung upon her lover's neck.
'Twas chiefly then the parting pain
That rent her heart, that pierced her brain ;
But soon the fear so undefined
So terrible will fill her mind ;
And then the very lightest breeze
That strips the sere autumnal trees ;
The flickering rack ; the sun-gilt cloud
Hung in midsky, a column proud ;
The wave as calm as infant's breath ;
All to her soul shall speak of death ;—
A death unblest by mortal knell,
A fate which none returns to tell,
Like theirs who in the Blenheim fell.

VIII.

Such thoughts, though all uncalled they dart,
As shades in moonlight forests start,
Yet to the eye and to the heart

They dim the ocean's smile.

Where shall the saddened spirit rest ?

Where, but upon thy verdant breast,
Moulded by Grace, by Nature drest,

Most loved most lovely Isle !

Fair Isle ! thou lingerest on the eye
Like the sweet world of Faëry,
Which brightens in the Italian beam
When Reggio's towers reflected gleam *.

For all along thy lengthening coast

From Ryde's romantic town,

To where, like threatening giants tost,

The beetling Needles frown ;

* It can scarcely be necessary to mention that I allude to the supposed operations of the Fata Morgana in the Faro di Messina.

Each lonely cot, or woody bay,
Or silver stream, or village gay,
Has caught the sweetly blended charm
Of distance soft, of sunshine warm ;
A bloomy green of shadowy hue,
Like meadows pale with morning dew ;
Outline so tender, so unfelt
It seems in sea and sky to melt ;
Colours, which language cannot teach,
Graces, which art despairs to reach.

IX.

Short distance seems to intervene
 'Twixt that enchanted land,
And the long variegated scene,
Where, forming tiny harbours green
Mid mimic promontories seen,
 New Forest stretches to the strand.

I marvel not the waters blue
Are dappled with reflected hue
Of mansion spire and cot ;
I marvel not that through the trees
The light smoke curling on the breeze
In glens which scarce the eye can seize,
Points many a peopled spot ;
I marvel not that all invade,
For all, Ytene, love thy shade.
The sportsman, though he little reck
Of scenery grand or rude,
Will oft his mettled courser check
To view thy solitude ;
Then dart across thy velvet lawn
As jocund as the bounding fawn.
The lover, joyless though he be,
Even he delights thy paths to see ;
And there, while fern and holly meet
Encompassing his green retreat,

Close by a rill where gray with moss
An aged aspen falls across,
He lies, and listens to the sound
Of leaves and streamlets murmuring round,
Till half he deems the water clear
Reflects the form he holds so dear.
The maid—no love sick maiden she !
Blythe as the warbling bird and free,
Joys with May-blossoms from the tree
 To deck her lonely bower ;
Or seek 'mid brake and bramble bred,
Just peeping from its mossy bed,
 The anemone's fair flower.
The minstrel—Oh each leafy spray
Is vocal with the minstrel's lay !
His is the exquisite delight
To ramble here at noon of night,
And by the glow-worm's trembling light
 Hold converse with the Fay.

X.

All love Ytene's pleasant shades ;
Yet rapidly the forest fades,
As, circling still from left to right,
Southampton bursts upon the sight.
How proudly on that lovely town
This lovelier villa glances down,
And stoops to art from nature's crown !
Castle and street, and quay and boat,
Blent in one busy picture float,
Gay, laughing, brilliant, debonair,
As if nor woe nor want nor care,
Nor aught but bliss could harbour there ;
Though still the walls of antique mould
Tell the proud tale of days of old :

They saw him burst from youthful sport,
They echoed to his mailed tread,
Who England's noblest battle led,
And won a realm at Agincourt.

XI.

Is there a better, brighter fame,
Than waits on British Harry's name ?
Embalmed in history's stately page
The hero of the heroic age ;
By Shakspeare's tricky fancy drest
Lord of the sword and of the jest ;
The deftest knight at joust or dance,
The conqueror of conquering France !
Though centuries have rolled away
His fame is fresh as yesterday.
But why should truant fancy sing
 Through the bright noontide hours,
Of glittering town and warlike king,
When she might wake the trembling string
 To Weston's peaceful bowers ?
Yet, lovely Weston, need I tell
That art's assembled beauties dwell
 Beneath thy classic dome ?

The unmouldering pride of Greece's land,
The glories of the Ausonian strand,
The rival gems of Britain's hand,

All here have found a home
With woman's taste, and man's fine sense,
And shy retiring eloquence.

Oh why from Fame doth Genius fly
And shun the world's admiring eye ?

'Tis ever so. He towers still

An eagle on his aërie hill ;

Or, like the golden beetle, glows

Close nestled in his mansion rose.

Whilst we, the ungifted many, stray,

Like chattering jays, from spray to spray ;

Or like the gnats in evening sky,

Wind the small horn of Poesy.——



THE END.



